

For the Master's Sake.

A Story of the Days of Queen Mary.

BY

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AUTHOR OF

"MISTRESS MARGERY;" "SISTER ROSE;" "LADY SYBIL'S CHOICE;"
ETC.

"Joyfully for Thee to die
Is not death, but victory."

CHANDLER.

New Edition.

LONDON:

JOHN F. SHAW AND CO.,

48, PATERNOSTER ROW, E.C.

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PREFACE.



HIS is not a story which requires much preface. The tale speaks for itself. But it is only right to inform the reader, that the persons who play their parts in it (apart from the historical details given) are all fictitious, excepting John Laurence and Agnes Stone.

It rests, under God, with the men and women of England—and chiefly with those of them who are young now—whether such events as are here depicted shall recur in this

nineteenth century. The battle of the Reformation will soon have to be fought over again; and reformations (no less than revolutions) are “not made with rose-water.”

“Choose you this day whom ye will serve! If the Lord be God, follow Him; but if Baal, then follow him.”

Are we ready to follow the Master,—if He lead to Calvary? Or are we ready to run the awful risk of hearing Christ’s “Depart!” rather than face men’s “Crucify”? Now, while it is called to-day, let us settle the question.





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"Aye, John, I can give thee up for Christ's sake. But I could not for
any other."



"What aileth thee, my daughter?"

p. 45.



"‘Why, Will, my little lad ! What matter now?’ ”

¶ 150.



FOR THE MASTER'S SAKE.



CHAPTER I.

GLAD TIDINGS.

“For when the heart of man shuts out,
Straightway the heart of God takes in.”

JAMES RUSSELL LOWELL.

“**O**OD luck, Agnes! Why, Agnes Stone! Thou art right well becalled Stone; for there is no more wit nor no more quickness in thee than in a pebble. Lack-a-daisy! but this were never good land sithence preaching came therein,—idle foolery that it is!—good for nought but to set folk by the ears, and learn young maids

for to gad about a-showing of their fine raiment, and a-gossiping one with another, whilst all the work to be wrought in the house falleth on their betters. Bodykins o' me! canst not hear mass once i' th' week, and tell thy beads of the morrow with one hand whilst thou feedest the chicks wi' th' other? and that shall be religion enough for any unlettered baggage like to thee. Here have I been this hour past a-toiling and a-moiling like a Barbary slave, while thou, my goodly young damosel, wert a-junketing it out o' door; and for why, forsooth? Marry, saith she, to hear a shaven crown preach at the Cross! Good sooth, but when I tell lies, I tell liker ones than so! And but now come home, by my troth; and all the pans o' th' fire might ha' boiled o'er, whilst thou, for aught I know, wert a-dancing in Finsbury Fields with a

parcel of idle jades like thyself. Beshrew thee for a lazy hilding¹ that ne'er earneth her bread by the half! Now then, hold thy tongue, Mistress, and get thee a-work, as a decent woman should. When I lack a lick o' th' rough side thereof, I'll give thee due note!"

Thus far Mistress Martha Winter poured out the vials of her wrath, standing with arms akimbo in the doorway, and addressing a slight, pale-faced, trembling girl of twenty years, who stood before her with bowed head, and made no attempt at self-defence. Indeed, she would have been clever who could have slipped in a sentence, or even have edged in a word, when Mistress Winter had pulled out of her wrath-bottle that cork which was so seldom in it, as Agnes Stone knew to her

¹ Young person; a term applied to either sex.

cost. Nor was it the girl's habit to excuse or defend herself. Mistress Winter's deprecation of that proceeding was merely a flourish of rhetoric. So Agnes, as usual, let the tempest blow over her, offering no attempt to struggle, but only to stand and endure.

Mistress Winter had made an excellent investment when, six years before, she adopted Agnes Stone, then an orphan, homeless and friendless; not by any means to be "treated as one of the family," but to be tyrannised over as drudge and victim in general. The transaction furnished her with two endless topics for gossip, on which she dilated with great enjoyment—her own surpassing generosity, and the orphan's intense unworthiness. The generosity was not costly; for the portion of food bestowed on Agnes consisted of the scraps usually given to a dog, while she

was clothed with such articles as were voted too shabby for the family wear. All work which was dirty or disagreeable, fell to Agnes as a matter of course. The widow's two daughters, Joan and Dorothy, respectively made her the vent for ill-temper, and the butt for sarcasm ; and if, in some rare moment of munificence, either of them bestowed on her a speckled apple, or a faded ribbon, the most abject gratitude was expected in return. She was practically a bond slave ; for except by running away, there was no chance of freedom ; and running away, in her case, meant starvation.

It had not always been thus. For ten years, more or less, before her term of bondage to Martha Winter, Agnes had lived with an aunt, her only surviving relative. During this stage of her life, she had taken her fair

share in the household work, had been fed and clothed—coarsely indeed, for her aunt was comparatively poor, but sufficiently—and she had been allowed a reasonable number of holidays, and had not been scolded, except when she deserved it. Though her aunt was an undemonstrative woman, who never gave her an endearing word or a caress, yet life with her was Elysium compared with present circumstances. But beyond even this, far back in early childhood, Agnes could dimly recollect another life again—a life which was love and sunshine—when a mother's hand came between her and hardship, a mother's heart brooded warmly over her, and a mother's lips called her by tender pet names, “as one whom his mother comforteth.” That was long ago; so long, that to look back upon it was almost like recalling some previous state of

existence; but the very memory of it, dim though it was, made the present bondage all the harder.

The offence which Agnes had committed on this occasion lay in having exceeded the time allowed her by six minutes. Out of respect to the day, which was the festival of Corpus Christi, she had been graciously granted the rare treat of a whole hour to spend as she pleased. She had chosen to spend it in hearing the latter half of a sermon preached at Paul's Cross. For, despite Mistress Winter's disdainful incredulity, the assertion was the simple truth ; though that lady, being one of the numerous persons who cannot imagine the possibility of anything unpleasant to themselves being delightful to others, had been unable to give credence to the statement. As to the charge of dancing

in Finsbury Fields, poor Agnes had never in her life been guilty of such a piece of dissipation. But she knew what to expect when she came in sight of the clock of St. Paul's Cathedral, and became mournfully conscious that she would have to confess where she had been : for Mistress Winter had peculiar ideas about religion, and a particular horror of being righteous overmuch, which usually besets people who have no tendency in that direction. Anything in the shape of a sermon was her special abhorrence. Every Sunday morning Agnes was required to wait upon her liege lady to matins—that piece of piety lasting for the week : and three times in the year, without the faintest consideration of her feelings—always terribly outraged thereby—poor Agnes was dragged before the tribunal of the family confessor, and required to give

a list of her sins since the last occasion. But anything beyond this, and sermons in particular, found no favour in the eyes of Mistress Winter.

Generally speaking, Agnes shrank from the mere thought of a lecture from this terrible dame. But this time, beyond the unpleasant sensation of the moment, it produced no effect upon her. Her whole mind was full of something else ; something which she had never heard before, and could never forget again ; something which made this hard, dreary, practical world seem entirely changed to her, as though suddenly bathed in a flood of golden light.

God loved her. This was what Agnes had heard. God, who could do everything, who had all the universe at His command, loved her, the poor orphan, the unlettered drudge ;

penniless, despised, unattractive—God loved her, just as she was. She drank in the glad tidings, as a parched soil drinks the rain.

But this was not all. God wanted her to love Him. He sought for her love, He cared for it. Amid all the hearts laid at His feet, He would miss hers if she did not give it. The thought came upon her like a new revelation from Heaven, direct to herself.

The preacher at the Cross that day was a Black Friar—a tall spare man, whom some might call gaunt and ungainly; a man of quick intelligence and radiant eyes, of earnest gesture and burning words. No idle monastic reveller this, but a man of one object, of one idea, full of zeal and determination. His years were a little over forty, and his name was John Laurence. But of himself Agnes thought very little; her whole soul was con-

centrated upon the message which he had brought her from God. God loved her! Since her mother died, she had been unloved. God loved her! And she had never asked Him for His love—she had never loved Him.

It was just the blessed fact itself which filled the heart, and mind, and soul of Agnes Stone. As to how it had come about, she had very little idea. She had not heard enough of the Friar's sermon to win any clear notion on that point; it was enough for her that it was so.

It never occurred to her to doubt the fact, and demand vouchers. It never occurred to her to suppose that her own hard lot was any contradiction to the theory. And it never occurred to her to imagine, as some do, that God's love led to no result; that He could love, and not care; that He could love, and

not be ready to save. Human love was better than that. The mother who, alone of all creatures, so far as she knew, had ever loved Agnes Stone, had shown her love by always caring, by always shielding from danger where it lay in her power. And surely the Fountain could be no weaker than the stream; the love of a weak, fallen, fallible human creature must be less, not more, than the love of Him who is, and who was, and who is to come; who is the same yesterday, and to-day, and for ever.

"Hie thee down this minute, thou good-for-nothing hussy!" thundered the voice of Mistress Winter up the garret stairs, as Agnes was hastily resuming her working garb. "I'll warrant thou didst ne'er set the foul clothes a-soaking as I bade thee ere thou wentest forth to take thy pleasure, and left me a-

slaving hither! Get thee to thy work, baggage! Thou art worth but one half as many pence as there be shillings in a groat!¹ I'll learn thee to gad hearing of sermons!"

"I set the clothes a-soaking ere I went forth, Mistress," said Agnes, coming quickly down stairs, and setting to work on the first thing she saw to need doing.

"Marry come up!" ejaculated Mistress Winter, looking at her. "Good luck! hast met with a fortune dropped from the clouds, that thou art all of a grin o' mirth?"

"I met with nought save that I went for," replied the girl quietly. But it struck her that the comparison of "a fortune dropped from the clouds" was a singularly happy one.

¹ A fourpenny-piece.

"Lack-a-daisy!" cried Dorothy. "The Friar must have told some merry tale belike. Prithee, give us the same, Agnes."

"Methinks it were scantily so merry for you, Mistress Doll," answered Agnes rather keenly. The stranger must not intermeddle with her joy. She held her new treasure with a tight, jealous grasp. Not yet had she learned that the living water flows the fuller for every streamlet that it fills; that the true riches are heaped the higher, the more lavish is the hand that transmits them.

"Hold thy silly tongue!" cried Mistress Winter, turning sharply round upon her daughter. "It were jolly work to fall of idle tale-telling, when all the work in the house gapeth for to be done!—Thou weary, dreary jade! what art thou after now? (Agnes was hastily mending a rent in the curtain.) To

fall to dainty stitchery, like a gentlewoman born, when every one of the trenchers lacketh scraping, and not the touch of a mop have the walls felt this morrow! Who dost look to, to slave for thee, prithee, my delicate-fingered damsel? Thou shouldst like well, I reckon, to have a serving-maid o' thy heels, for to 'tend to all matter that was not sweet enough for thy high degree! *I* go not about to sweep up the dirt off thy shoes, and so I tell thee plainly!"

Certainly there was not often any want of perspicuity in Mistress Winter's admonitions, though there might occasionally be a little lack of elegance and gentleness. But plainly told or not, Agnes remained silent, scraped the wooden trenchers, a process which answered to the washing of earthenware, and duly mopped the walls, and to the best of

her power fulfilled the hard pleasure of her superior.

And here let us leave her for a moment, while we take a glance at the outer world, to discover where we are in the stream of time, and what sort of an England it is into which we have entered.

The day, the festival of Corpus Christi, is the first of June, 1553. King Edward VI. is on the throne—a white-faced, grave, reserved boy of fifteen years, whose life is to close about five weeks thereafter. But beside the throne, and on it in all but name—his hand firmly grasping the reins of power, his voice the living law of the State—stands John Dudley, Duke of Northumberland; a man whose steel-blue eyes are as cold as his heart, and whose one aim in every action of his life is the welfare and aggrandisement of John

Dudley. He professes himself a Lutheran : at heart, if he care at all for religion of any kind, he is a Papist. But it will not be of service to John Dudley at the present moment to confess that little fact to the world. Grouped around these two are men of all types—Cranmer, Archbishop of Canterbury, true Nature's gentleman, leal-hearted Gos-peller, delicate in mind, clear in intellect, only not able, having done all, to stand ; Ridley, Bishop of London, whose firm, intelligent, clear-cut features are an index to his character—perhaps a shade too severe, yet as severe to himself as any other ; Hugh Latimer, blunt, warm-hearted old man, who calls a spade a spade in the most uncompromising manner, and spares not vice, though it flaunt its satin robes in royal halls ; William Herbert, Earl of Pembroke, the mean-spirited time-

server who would cry long life to a dozen rival monarchs in as many minutes, so long as he thought it would advance his own interests; Henry Grey, Duke of Suffolk, who spends his life in a fog of uncertainty, wherein the most misty object is his own mind; William Paulet, Marquis of Winchester, who always remembers his motto, "I bend, but break not;" Richard Lord Rich, the sensual-faced, comfortable-looking, stony-hearted man who pulled off his gown the better to rack Anne Askew, of old time; and, behind them all, one of whom they all think but little—a young man of short stature, with good forehead, and small, wizened features—Mr. Secretary Cecil, some day to be known as the great Earl of Burleigh, who holds in his clever hands, as he sits in the background with his silent face, the strings that move most of these

puppets, and pulls them without the puppets knowing it, until, on the accession of Mary, the Tower gates will be opened, and Stephen Gardiner will walk forth, to take the reins into his hands, and to steep England in blood.

Of public events, there have been few since the general confiscation of church plate in the preceding month.

The Londoners, of whom our friends at Mistress Winter's form a part, are divided in opinion concerning this step; but neither party has been too much distressed to observe the usual dance round the Strand maypole, on the site of which St. Mary-le-Strand will presently be built. At present, and for those five weeks yet to come, the march of events is dull and sleepy. It will be sufficiently lively and startling to please the most sen-

sational, before many days of July have run out.

The Bible is now open in every parish church, chained to a desk, so that any one who pleases may read. The entire service is conducted in English. The roods and images have been pulled down; candles, ashes, and palms are laid aside; “the wolves are kept close” in Tower and Fleet and Marshalsea; masses, public and private, are contraband articles; the marriage of priests is freely allowed; the altar has been replaced by the table. It is still illegal to eat flesh in Lent; but this is rather with a view to encourage the fish trade than with any religious object.

To turn to minor matters, such as costume and customs, we find Government does not disdain to occupy itself in the regulation of the former, by making stringent sumptuary

laws, and effectually securing their observance by heavy fines. The gentlemen dress in the Blue-Coat style, occasionally varying it by a short tunic-like coat instead of the long gown, and surmounting it by a low flat cap, which the nobles ornament by an ostrich feather. The ladies array themselves in long dresses, full of plaits, and often stiff as crino-line—plain for the commonalty, but heavily laden with embroidery, and deeply edged with fur, in the case of the aristocracy. Both sexes, if aspiring to fashion, puff and slash their attire in all directions. The ruff, shortly to become so fashionable, is only just creeping into notice, and as yet contents itself with very modest dimensions.

Needles are precious articles, of which she is a rich woman who possesses more than two or three. Glass bottles are unknown, and

their place is supplied by those of leather, wood, or stone. Wooden bowls and trenchers for the poor, gold and silver plate for the rich, make up for the want of china. The fuel is chiefly wood, coal being considered unhealthy. Every now and then Government takes alarm at the prodigious size to which the metropolis is growing, and an Act is passed to restrain further building within a given distance from the City walls. Country gentlemen receive peremptory orders to reside on their estates, and not to visit London except by licence; for the authorities are afraid lest the influx of visitors should cause famine and pestilence. There is no drainage; for every householder pours his slops into the street, with a warning shout, that the passengers below may run out of the way. There are few watches, and fewer carriages; no cabs, no police, no

post-office; no potatoes, tea, coffee, newspapers, brown paper, copper coinage, street-lamps, shawls, muslin or cotton goods. But there is at times the dreaded plague, which decimates wherever it comes; the terrible frequency of capital punishment for comparatively trivial offences; the pleasant probability of meeting with a few highwaymen in every country journey; the paucity of roads, and the extreme roughness of such as do exist; a lamentable lack of education, even in the higher classes, hardly atoned for by the exceptional learning of one here and there; and (though the list might be greatly enlarged) last, not least, the constant presence of vermin of the most objectionable sort, from which neither palace nor cottage is exempt.

This, then, was the England of 1553.



CHAPTER II.

FATHER DAN.

“Fasting is all very well for those
Who have to contend with invisible foes :
But I am quite sure that it does not agree
With a quiet, peaceable man like me.”

LONGFELLOW.

HAPPILY for Agnes Stone, she was too low down in the world for many things to affect her which sorely troubled the occupants of the upper strata. Sumptuary laws were of no consequence to a woman whose best gown was patched with pieces of different colours, and who had not a hood in her possession ; taxes

and subsidies, though they might press heavily on the rich, were no concern of hers, for she did not own a penny ; while no want, however complete, of letters, books, and newspapers, distressed the mind of one who had never learned the alphabet.

Mistress Winter dwelt in Cowbridge Street, otherwise Cow Lane ; now the site of crowded City thoroughfares, but then a quiet, pleasant, suburban lane, the calm of which was chiefly broken by the presence, on market-days, of numbers of the animal whence the street took its name, caused by the close proximity of Smithfield. Green fields lay at the back of the houses, through which, on its way to the Thames, ran the little Fleet River, anciently known as the River of the Wells ; beyond it towered the Bishop of Ely's Palace, with its extensive walled garden, famous for straw-

berries; to the left was the pleasant and healthy village of Clerkenwell, whither the Londoners were wont to stroll on summer evenings, to drink milk at the country inn, and gossip with each other round the holy well. On the right hand, between Cow Lane and the Thames, lay the open, airy suburbs of Fleet and Temple, and the royal Palace of Bridewell, with its grounds. In front, Hosier Lane and Cock Lane gave access to Smithfield, beyond which was the sumptuous but now dissolved Priory of St. Bartholomew, the once royal domain of Little Britain, and the walls and gates of the great city, with the grand tower of St. Paul's Cathedral visible in the distance, over the low roofs of the surrounding houses.

The locality of Cow Lane was far from being a low neighbourhood, though its name was not particularly aristocratic in sound.

In the old days before the dissolution, which Agnes could just remember, the Prior of Sempringham had his town house in Cow Lane; and the Earl of Bath lived on the further side of the Fleet River, with Furnival's Inn beyond, the residence of the Barons Furnival, now merged in the Earldom of Shrewsbury. Mistress Winter lived in the last house at the north end of the lane, next to Cow Cross, and almost in the country. There is no need to name her neighbours, with two exceptions, since these only are concerned in the story. But in Cow Lane every body knew every body else's business; and the mistress at the Fetterlock could not put on a new ribbon without the chambermaid at the Black Lion being aware of it. Do not rush to the conclusion, gentle modern reader, that Cow Lane was full of

inns or public-houses. Streets were not numbered in those days; and in order to effect the necessary distinction between one house and another, every man hung out his sign, selecting a silent woman,¹ a blue cow, a griffin, or a rose, according as his fancy led him. Sign-painting must have been a profitable trade at that time, and a very necessary one, when scarcely one man in twenty knew his alphabet; and the cardinal figures were cabalistic signs to common eyes.

The two families previously alluded to lived at the southern end of Cow Lane, and their respective names were Flint and Marvell. Mistress Flint was a cheerful, good-tempered woman, with whom life went easily, and who had a large family of sons and daughters, the

¹ This, I am sorry to say, was a lady without a head. It probably indicated the residence of an old bachelor.

youngest but one, little Will, being a special favourite with Agnes. The Marvells were very quiet people, who kept their opinions and feelings to themselves; though their son Christie, a mischievous lad of some twelve years, was renowned in Cow Lane for the exact opposite.

The day was drawing towards evening, when Agnes, as she turned round from emptying a pail of dirty water into the common sewer of Cow Lane, detected the burly figure of Father Dan, the Cordelier Friar, who was Mistress Winter's family confessor, coming up from Seacoal Lane. Not without some fears of his errand, she waited till he came near, and then humbly louted—the ancient English reverence, now conventionally supposed to be restricted to charity children.

“Christ save all here!” said the priest, hold-

ing up three fingers in the style of benediction peculiar to his Order.

Taking no further notice of Agnes, he marched within, to be cordially welcomed, and his blessing begged, by Mistress Winter and Dorothy; for Joan was gone to see the bear-baiting in Southwark.

Father Dan was a priest of the popular type—florid, fat, and jovial. His penances were light and easy to those who had it in their power to ask him to dinner, or to make gifts to his Order. It might be that they were all the harder to those from whom such favours were not expected.

The Cordelier took his seat at the supper-table just laid by Dorothy, this being an easy and dainty style of work in which that young lady condescended to employ her delicate hands. Mistress Winter was busily occupied

with a skillet containing some savoury compound, and the Friar's eyes twinkled with expectant gastronomic delight as he watched the proceedings of his hostess. Supper being at last ready, the three prepared to do justice to it, while Agnes waited upon them. A golden flood of buttered eggs was poured upon the dish in front of the Friar, a cherry pie stood before Dorothy, while Mistress Winter, her sleeves rolled up, and her widow's barb¹ laid aside because of the heat, was energetically attacking some ribs of beef.

"Had Joan no purpose to be back for supper, Doll?" demanded her mother.

"Nay," said Dorothy; "Mall Whitelock bade her to supper in Long Lane. I heard them discoursing of the same."

¹ The barb was a plaiting of white linen, which was fastened at the chin, and entirely covered the neck.

"And what news abroad, Father?" asked Mistress Winter. "Pray you, give me leave to help you to another shive of the beef. Agnes, thou lither¹ jade, whither hast set the mustard?"

Father Dan's news was of a minute type. He was no intellectual philosopher, no profound conspirator; he was indeed slightly interested in the advancement of the Church, and much more deeply so in that of his own particular Order; but beyond this, his mind was one of those which dwell rather on the game season than the government of the country, and was likely to feel more pleasure in an enormous gooseberry, or a calf with two heads, than in the outbreak of a European war, or the discovery of an unknown continent. The great subject in his mind at the

¹ Wicked.

moment was starch. Somebody—Father Dan regretted that he was not able to name him—had discovered the means of manufacturing a precious liquid, which would impart various colours, and indescribable powers of standing alone, to any texture of linen, lawn, or lace.

“Good heart! what labour it shall save!” cried lazy Dorothy—who did assist in the more delicate parts of the household washing, but shirked as much of it as she could.

“Aye, and set you off, belike, Mistress Doll,” added the complimentary Friar. “As for us, poor followers of Saint Francis, no linen alloweth us our Rule, so that little of the new matter is like to come our way. They of Saint Dominic shall cheapen well the same,¹

¹ Buy plenty of it.

I reckon," he added, with a contemptuous curl of his lip, intended for the rival Order.

"But lo' you, there is another wonder abroad, as I do hear tell," remarked Mistress Winter, "and 'tis certain matter the which, being taken—Agnes, thou dolt! what hast done wi' the salad?—being taken hendily¹ off the top of ale when 'tis a-making, shall raise bread all-to² as well as sour-dough. I know not what folk call it.—Thou idle, gaping dizzard!³ and I have to ask thee yet again what is come of aught, it shall be with mine hand about thine ears! Find a spoon this minute!"

"Ha!" said Father Dan, helping himself to sack,⁴ which had been brought out spe-

¹ Gently, delicately.

² Almost.

³ Fool.

⁴ Sack appears to have been a general name for white wine, especially the sweeter kinds.

cially to do him honour. “*Yeast* is it I have heard the same called. ’Tis said the bread is better tasted therewith, rather than sour dough.”

“Pray you, good Father, to eat of this salad,” entreated his hostess. “I had it of one of my Lord of Ely his gardeners; and there is therein the new endive, and the Italian parsley, that be no common matter.”

That the Cordelier was by no means indifferent to the good things of this life might be seen in his face, as he drew the wooden salad bowl a little nearer.

“Have you beheld the strange bird that Mistress Flint hath had sent to her overseas?” inquired he. “I do hear that great lords and ladies have kept such like these fifty years or so; but never saw I one thereof aforetime. ’Tis bright yellow of plumage, and

singeth all one as a lark: they do call his name canary."

"Nay, forsooth, I never see aught that should do me a pleasure!" said Mistress Winter crustily. "Gossip Flint might have told me so much.—Take that, thou lither hussy! I'll learn thee to let fall the knives!"

And on the ear of the unfortunate Agnes, as she was stooping to recover the dropped knife, came Mistress Winter's hand, with sufficient heaviness to make her grow white and totter ere she could recover her balance.

Father Dan took no notice. He could not have afforded to quarrel with Mistress Winter, especially now when priests of the old style were at a discount; and in his eyes such creatures as Agnes were made to be beaten and abused. He merely saw in his hostess a notable housewife, and in Agnes a kind of

animated machine, with just soul enough to be kept to the duty of confession, and require a careless absolution, three times in the year. Such people had no business, in Father Dan's eyes, to have thoughts or feelings of any sort. They were sent into the world to mop and cook and serve their betters. Of course, when the animated machines did take to thinking for themselves, and to showing that they had done so, the Cordelier regarded it as most awkward and inconvenient—a piece of insubordinate presumption that must be stamped out at once, and not suffered to infect others.

After further conversation in the same style, being unable to go on eating and drinking for ever, Father Dan rose to depart. It was not confession-time, and on all other occasions Father Dan's pastoral visits came very much

under the head of revelling. There was not a syllable of religious conversation ; that was considered peculiar to the confessional.

Mistress Winter and Dorothy, after a little needlework and some more scolding of Agnes, tramped upstairs to bed ; and Joan, coming in half an hour later, excessively cross after her day's pleasuring, followed the example. Having put away the supper things, and laid every thing in readiness for the morrow's work, Agnes stood for a moment before she too lay down on her hard pallet in the one chamber above that served all four as bedroom. Through the uncurtained window high up in the room the June stars looked down upon her. She had no notion of prayer, except telling beads to Latin Paters and Aves ; but the instinct of the awakened spirit rose in something like it.

"God, Thou lovest me!" she said in her heart. He was there, somewhere beyond those stars. He would know what she was thinking. "I know but little of Thee; I desire to know more. Thou, who lovest me, tell some one to teach me!"

It would have astonished her to be told that such unuttered longings for the knowledge of God could be of the nature of prayer. Brought up in intense formalism, it never occurred to her that it was possible to pray without an image, a crucifix, or a pair of beads. She crept to her poor straw pallet, and lay down. But the latest thought in her heart, ere she dropped asleep, was, "God loves me; God will take care of me, and teach me." She would have been startled to hear that this was faith. Faith, to her, meant relying on the priest, and obeying the Church. But

was there no whisper — unheard even by herself—

“ O woman, great is thy faith : be it unto thee even as thou wilt ” ?





CHAPTER III.

MAKING PROGRESS.

“I care not how lone in this world I may be,
So long as the Master remembereth me.”

HELEN MONRO.

“ O sure as our sweet Lady, Saint Mary, worketh miracles at Walsingham, never was poor woman so beplagued as I, with an ill, ne'er-do-well, good-for-nought, thankless hussy, picked up out of the mire in the gutter! Where be thy wits, thou gadabout? Didst leave them at the Cross yester-morrow? Go thither and seek for them! for ne'er a barley crust shalt

thou break this even in this 'house, or my name is not Martha Winter!"

And, snatching up a broom, Mistress Winter hunted Agnes out of doors, and slammed the door behind her.

It was not altogether a new thing for Agnes to be turned out into the street for the night, and Mistress Winter reserved it as her most tremendous penalty. Perhaps, had she known how Agnes regarded it, she might have invented a new one. These occasions were her times of recreation, when she usually took refuge with good-natured Mistress Flint, who was always ready to give Agnes a supper and a share of her girls' bed. A few hours in the cheerful company of the Flints was a real refreshment to the hard-worked and ever-abused drudge. But this time she did not at once seek Mistress Flint. She

walked, as Mistress Winter had amiably suggested, straight to the now deserted Cross, and sat down on one of its stone steps. It would not be dark yet for another hour, and until the gathering dusk warned her to return, Agnes meant to stay there. She was feeling very sad and perplexed. The glory in which the world had been steeped only yesterday had grown pale and grey. The cares of the world had come in. Poor Agnes had set out that morning with a firm determination to serve God throughout the day. Her idea of service consisted in the ceaseless mental repetition of forms of prayer. Busy with her Aves and Paternosters, she had forgotten to shut the oven door, and a baking of bread had been spoiled. She sat now mournfully wondering how any one in her position could serve God. If such mischances as this were

always to happen, she could never get through her work. And the work must be done. Mistress Winter was one of the last people in the world to permit religion to take precedence of housewifery. How then was poor Agnes ever to "make her salvation" at all?

The mistake was natural enough. All her life she had walked in the mist of self-righteousness; her teachers had carefully led her into it. Starting from the idea that man had to merit God's favour, was it any wonder that, when told that God loved her already, she still fancied that, in order to retain that love, she must do something to deserve it? The new piece was sewn on the old garment, and the rent was made worse.

But now, must she give up the glad thought of being loved? If serving God, as she understood that service, made her neglect

her every-day duties, what then? How was she ever to serve God? It was a misfortune for Agnes that she had heard only half of the Friar's sermon. The other half would have removed her difficulties.

She had reached this point in her perplexed thoughts, when she was startled by a voice inquiring—

“What aileth thee, my daughter?”

Agnes looked up, and beheld the same dark shining eyes which had flashed down upon her from the Cross yesterday morning.

“I scarcely can tell,” she said, speaking out her thoughts. “It seemeth not worth the while.”

“What seemeth thus?” asked the Friar.

“Living,” said the girl quietly. There was no bitterness in her tone, hardly even weariness; it was simply hopeless.

The Friar remained silent for a moment, and Agnes spoke again.

"Father," she faltered, in a low, shy voice, "I heard you preach here yester-morrow."

"I brought thee glad tidings," was the significant answer.

The tears sprang to her eyes. "O Father!" she said, "I thought them so glad—that God loved me, and would have me for to love Him; but now 'tis all to no good. I cannot serve God."

"What letteth?"

"That I am in the world, and must needs there abide."

"What for no? Serve God in the world."

"Good Father, if you did but know, you should not say the same!" said Agnes in the same hopeless tone in which she had spoken before.

"If I knew but what?"

In answer, Agnes told him her simple story; unavoidably revealing in it the hardships of her lot. "You must needs see, good Father," she concluded, "that I cannot serve God and do Mistress Winter's bidding."

"I see no such a thing, good daughter," replied the Friar. "Dost think the serving of God to lie in the saying of Paternosters? It is thine heart that He would have. Put thine heart in thy labour, and give Him both together."

"But how so, Father?" inquired Agnes in an astonished tone. "I pray you tell me how I shall give to God the baking of bread?"

"Who giveth thee thy daily bread?"

"That, no doubt, our Lord doth."

"Yet He giveth the same by means. He giveth it through the farmer, the miller, and

the baker. It falleth not straight down from Heaven. When thou art the bakester, art not thou God's servant to give daily bread ? Then thy work should be good and perfect, for He is perfect. By the servant do men judge of the master ; and if thy work is to be offered unto God, it must be the best thou canst do. Think of this the next time thou art at work, and I warrant thee not to forget the oven door. But again : Who hath set thee thy work ? When this hard mistress of thine betook thee to her house, did not God see it ? did not He order it ? If so be, then every her order to thee (that is not sinful, understand thou) is God's order. Seek then, in the doing thereof, not to please her, but Him."

"O Father, if I could do that thing!"

"Child, when the Master went home for a season, and left His lodging here below, He

appointed ‘to every man his work.’ Some of us have hard work: let us press on with it cheerfully. If we be His, it is *His* work. He knoweth every burden that we bear, and how hard it presseth, and how sore weary are His child’s shoulders. Did He bear no burdens Himself in the carpenter’s workshop at Nazareth; yea, and up the steep of Calvary? Let Him have thy best work. He hath given thee His best.”

Never before, nor in so short a time, had so many new ideas been suggested to the mind of Agnes Stone. The very notion of Christ’s sympathy with men was something strange to her. She had been taught to regard Mary as the tender human sympathiser, and to look upon Christ in one of two lights—either as the helpless Infant in the arms of the mother, or as the stern Judge who required to be

softened by Mary's merciful intercession. But the one gush of confidence over, she was doubly shy. She shrank from clothing her vague thoughts with precise and distinct language.

"I would I might alway confess unto you, Father," she said gratefully, rising from her hard seat.

"I would have thee confess unto a better than I, my daughter," was the priest's answer. "There is no confessor like to the great Confessor of God. Christ shall make never a blunder; and He beareth no tales. Thine innermost heart's secrets be as safe with Him as with thyself."

"But must I not confess to a priest?" demanded Agnes in a surprised tone.

"There is one Priest, my daughter," said the Friar. "And 'because He continueth

ever, unchangeable hath He the priesthood.' There can be none other."

This was another new idea to Agnes—if possible, more strange than the former. She ventured a faint protest which showed the nature of her thoughts.

"But He, that is the Judge at the dooms-day! how could such as I e'er confess to Him?"

A smile—which was sad, not mirthful—parted the grave lips of the Black Friar.

"Child!" he answered, "there is no man so lowly, there is no man so loving, as the Man Christ Jesus."

Agnes was so deep in thought that she did not hear his retreating steps. She looked up with a further remark on her lips, and found that he was gone.

It was nearly dark now, and there was only

just time to reach the City gate before the hour when it would be closed. Agnes hurried on quickly, passed out of Newgate, and, afraid of being benighted, almost ran up Giltspur Street to the south end of Cow Lane. A hasty rap on Mistress Flint's door brought little Will to open it.

"Good luck!" said the child. "Mother, here is Mistress Agnes Stone."

"What, Agnes!" cried Mistress Flint's cheery voice from within. "Come in, dear heart, and welcome. What news to-night, trow?"

"The old news, my mistress," said Agnes, smiling, "that here is a supperless maid bereft of lodgment, come to see if your heart be as full of compassion as aforetime."

"Lack-a-daisy! hath Gossip Winter turned thee forth? Well, thank the saints, there is

room to spare for thee here. Supper will be ready ere many minutes, I guess. Prithee take hold o' th' other end of Helen's work, and it shall be all the sooner."

Helen Flint, who was busy at the fire, welcomed the offered help with a bright smile like her mother's, and set Agnes to work at once. The latter was beginning to find herself very hungry, and Mistress Flint treated her guest to considerably better fare than Mistress Winter did her drudge. There were comparatively few of the household at home to supper; for the party consisted only of Mr. and Mrs. Flint, two daughters, Helen and Anne, and the little boys, Will and Dickon.

"What news abroad, Goodman?" demanded Mistress Flint, when her curiosity got the better of her hunger.

"Why, that 'tis like to rain," returned her

husband, a quiet, unobtrusive man, with a good deal of dry humour.

"That I wist aforetime," retorted she; "for no sooner set I my foot out of the door this morrow than I well-nigh stepped of a black snail."

"I reckon," observed Mr. Flint, calmly cutting into a pasty, "that black snails be some whither when there is no wet at hand."

"Gramercy, nay!" cried unphilosophical Mistress Flint.

"Oh, so?" said he. "Fall they from the sky, trow, or grow up out o' th' ground?"

"Dear heart,¹ Jack Flint! how can I tell?" answered his wife.

"Then, dear heart, Mall Flint!" responded he, imitating her, "I'd leave be till I so could."

¹ Darling, beloved one.

Mistress Flint laughed ; for nothing ever disturbed her temper, and the banter was as good-humoured as possible.

" Well, for sure ! " said she. " Is there ne'er a man put in the pillory, nor a woman whipped at the cart-tail, nor so much as a strange fish gone by London Bridge ? Ha, Nan ! yonder 's a stranger in the bars. Haste thee, see what manner of man."

Anne left the form on which she was sitting, and peered intently into the grate.

" 'Tis a dark man, Mother," said she, after careful investigation.

" Is he nigh at hand ? " inquired Mistress Flint anxiously.

" I trow so," replied Anne, still occupied with the bars, " and reasonable rich to boot."

" Marry, yonder 's a jolly hearing ! " said her mother.

"How so," asked Mr. Flint, pursing up his lips, "without he make us a gift of his riches?"

"Dear heart alive!" suddenly ejaculated Mistress Flint, turning round on Helen. "How many a score o' times must I tell thee, Nell, that to lay thy knife and spoon the one across the other is the unluckiest thing in all this world, saving only the breaking of a steel glass,¹ and a winding-sheet in the candle? Lay them straight along this minute, child! Dear, dear; but to think of it!"

Helen, in some perturbation, altered her knife and spoon to the required positions.

"Now, Agnes, dear heart, prithee get some flesh o' thy bones!" said Mistress Flint, returning to her usual cheery manner. "Good lack! I love not to see a maid so like to a

¹ Looking-glass.

scarecrow as thou. Come now, another shive of mutton? well, then, a piece o' th' pasty—do! Eh, in good sooth, thou mayest well look white. Now, Will and Dickon, lads, 'tis time ye were abed."

Will and Dickon, thus addressed, promptly knelt down, one on each side of his mother, and Will proceeded to gabble over his prayers, followed by Dickon with articulate sounds which had no other merit than that of bearing some resemblance to the words in question.

The boys commenced by crossing themselves, then they raced through the Paternoster, the Angelical Salutation, and the Creed, all in Latin; of course without the faintest idea of any meaning. They then repeated a short prayer in English, entreating the Virgin, their guardian angels, and their patron saints, to protect them during the night. This done,

Will rattled off half a dozen lines (carefully emphasising the insignificant words), which alone of all the proceeding had either interest or meaning in his eyes.

“Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John,
Bless the bed that I lie on:
Four corners to my bed,
Four angels at their head—
One to read, and one to write,
And two to guard my bed at night.”

“Good lads!” said Mistress Flint, as she rose and restored the crucifix which she had been holding before the boys to its usual place.

“Mother!” said Will, who was inconveniently intelligent, “who be Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John? Doth it mean Luke Dobbs, and Father?”

Mr. Flint indulged himself in a quiet laugh.

“Nay, dear heart!” answered his mother.

"Those be the holy Apostles, that writ the Evangelis."

"What be the Evangelis, Mother?"

"Did ever one see such a lad to put questions?" demanded Mistress Flint. "Why, child, they be writ in the great Bible, that lieth chained in the Minster."

"What be they about, Mother?"

"Come, lad, if I tarry to answer all thy talk, thou shalt not be abed this even," responded Mistress Flint discreetly; for this was a query which she would have found it hard to answer; and with a playful show of peremptoriness, she drove Will and Dickon upstairs to the bedchamber, in which slept the five boys of the family.

There was a minute's silence, only broken by the movements of Helen and Anne, who were putting away the bowls, jugs, and

trenchers which had been used at supper, when suddenly Mr. Flint said—to nobody in particular—

“What *be* they about?”

His daughters looked up, and then resumed their occupation, with a shake of the head from Anne, and a little laugh from Helen.

“Methinks, Master,” said Agnes rather diffidently, “’tis about God, and His love to men.”

“What thereabout?” replied he, continuing to look into the fire.

“Why, Master,” said Agnes, “surely you do wit better than I.”

“Well, I wit nougnt thereabout, nor never want,” said Anne a little pettishly. “’Twill be time enough when I have the years o’ my grandame, I guess, to make me crabbed and gloomsome.”

Agnes looked at her in amazement.

"Nan," said her father, "I heard thee this morrow a-singing of a love-song."

"Well, so may you yet again," said she, laughing.

"That made thee not gloomsome, trow?" he asked.

"Never a whit! how should it?" replied Anne, still laughing.

"Let be! but 'tis queer," said he, rising. "Man's love is merry gear; but God's love is crabbed stuff. 'Tis a strange world, my maids."

Both Helen and Anne broke into a peal of laughter; but Mr. Flint was grave enough. He walked through the kitchen, and out at the front door, without saying more.

"What hath come o'er Father of late?" said Helen. "He is fallen to ask as queer questions as Will."

"What know I?" replied Anne, "or care, for the matter of that. Come, Nell, let us sing a bit, to cheer us!"

It struck Agnes that there was not much want of cheer in that house; but Helen readily responded to her sister's wish, and they struck up a popular song.

"The hunt is up, the hunt is up,
The hunt is up and away,
And Harry our King is gone hunting,
To bring his deer to bay.

"The east is bright with morning light,
And darkness it is fled,
And the merry horn wakes up the morn
To leave his idle bed.

"Behold the skies with golden dyes
Are glowing all around,
The grass is green, and so are the treen,
All laughing at the sound."

The sisters sang well, and Agnes enjoyed the music. This song was followed by others,

and Mistress Flint, coming down, joined in ; and the eldest son, Ned, made his appearance and did the same, till there was almost a concert. At last Mistress Flint stopped the harmony, by declaring that she could not keep awake five minutes longer ; and all parties made the best of their way to bed.

Mistress Winter was found, on the following morning, to have recovered as much of her temper as she was usually in the habit of recovering. That Joan had lost hers was nothing new ; it was rarely the case that both mother and daughter were in an amiable mood together. The former received Agnes with her customary amenities, merely suggesting, with pleasantry of her own kind, that of course 'twould be too heavy a toil for her gracious madamship to carry the water-pails to Horsepool—the spring in West Smithfield which

supplied Cow Lane—and that so soon as she could hear tell of a gentlewoman lacking of a service, she would engage her at ten pound by the month to wait of her worshipfulness. Agnes made no answer in words ; she only took up the pails quietly and went out. As she came up to Horsepool, she spied her friend Mistress Flint, bent on a similar errand, coming up Cock Lane.

“ Dear heart, Agnes ! ” cried the latter. “ Is there none save thee to bear those heavy pails of water ? Methinks yon lazy Joan might lift one, and be none the worser. She hath the strength of a horse, and thou barely so much as a robin.”

Agnes smiled her thanks for her friend’s sympathy, as she let down the water-pails.

“ I am used to the same, Mistress Flint, I thank you.”

"Go to,—wert thou at the Cross t' other morrow? Methought I saw thy face in the throng."

A light broke over the face, but Agnes only said, "Aye."

"How liked thee yon Friar's discourse?"

"It liked me well."

"Marry, thus said Cicely Marvell, that dwelleth by me. But for me, I saw none so much therein to make ado o'er. 'God loveth men'—aye, to be sure He doth so: and 'we should love God'—why, of course we so should, and do. Forsooth, what then, I pray you?"

"Why, then, much comfort, as meseemeth," answered Agnes.

"Comfort!" repeated Mrs. Flint, looking at her. "Aye, poor soul, I dare say thou hast need. But I lack no comfort at this present,

the blessed Sacrament be thanked! I have enough and to spare."

And, half laughing, with a farewell nod, Mrs. Flint took up her full pail, and trudged away. With some surprise Agnes realized that to this cheerful, healthy, prosperous woman, the ray of light which was making her whole soul glad, was not worth opening the windows to behold ; the wine of Paradise which brimmed her cup with joy, was only common water. Perhaps, before that light could make a happy heart glad, other lights must be put out ; before the water could be changed to wine, other conduits must run dry. It was well for Agnes Stone that she had nothing wherewith to quench her thirst but the cup of salvation, and no light to shine upon her pathway but the light of life.



CHAPTER IV.

THE ROOT OF THE MATTER.

“ My Christ He is the Heaven of Heavens—
My Christ what shall I call?
My Christ is first, my Christ is last,
My Christ is all in all.”

JOHN MASON.



S Agnes toiled home with her weary burden, she met her own special favourite, little Will.

“ Look you, Mistress Agnes!” cried little Will, triumphantly holding up his horn-book.
“ I can say all my Christ-Cross-Row¹—every letter!”

¹ Alphabet.

“Dear heart!” returned Agnes, sympathising in her little friend’s pleasure.

“And as to-morrow I am to join the letters!” exclaimed little Will again, in high exultation.

“I trust thou wilt be a good lad, Will, and apply thee diligently.”

“Oh, aye,” said Will, dismissing that part of the question somewhat curtly. “And look you, I met, an half-hour gone, with the Black Friar that preached at the Cross th’ other morrow; and he saw my horn-book, and asked at me if I knew the same. And when I said I so did, what did he, think you, but sat him down of a stone, and would needs have me for to say it all o’er unto him. And I made but one only blunder; I said, ‘Q, S, R,’ in the stead of ‘Q, R, S.’ And he strake mine head, and said I was a good lad, and he

would I should go on with my learning till I might read in the great Bible that lieth chained in the Minster."

"Well-a-day! did he so?" responded Agnes.

"Aye, so did he. But wot you what Christie Marvell saith? He saith 'tis rare evil doing that any save a priest should read in yon big book, and he hath heard his father for to say the same. And he saith old Father Dan, the Cordelier, that is alway up and down hereabout, he said unto him that he would not for no money that he should learn to read the Evangel, for that it should do him a mischief. What think you, Mistress Agnes?"

"Methinks, Will, thou shalt do well to give good heed unto the Black Friar, and to thy master at the school, and leave Christie Marvell a-be with his idle talk."

"Nay, go to, Mistress Agnes! 'tis Father Dan's talk."

"Then tarry till Father Dan tell thee so much himself. It may well be that Christie took not his words rightly."

"Aye," said the child, doubtfully. "But what manner of mischief, think you, meant he? Should it cast a spell on me, or give me the ague?"

Little Will, as we have already seen, was the child of a superstitious mother. To hear the tap of a death-watch was sufficient to make Mistress Flint lose a night's sleep; and a person who disbelieved in fairies she would have considered next door to a reprobate. But Agnes was remarkably free from such ideas for her time, when few were entirely devoid of them; and she laughed at little Will's fancy.

"Well," said he, "any way, when I can read in the great Bible, Mistress Agnes, then will I read unto you, and you shall come to the Minster and hear me. Christie's mother saith there be right pretty stories therein."

Like many another in those days, into the household of Henry and Cicely Marvell, the Gospel had brought not peace, but a sword. The husband, a stern, morose man, was fondly attached to the beggarly elements of Roman ceremonials ; while the wife had received and hidden the Word in her heart, and though too much afraid of her husband to venture far, contrived now and then to drop a word for Christ's Gospel. Christie, the troublesome boy, cared for none of these things, and made game of the views of each parent in turn.

Agnes smilingly bade good-bye to her ambitious little friend Will, for they had now

reached Mistress Winter's door. A scolding awaited her, as usual, first for "dawdling," and then for spilling a few drops of water on the brick floor as she set down the heavy pails. But Agnes scarcely heeded it, for her mind was full of a new project. It would be some time before little Will could read, and longer still before he could see over the Minster desk, where the great Bible lay chained. But why should she wait for that? She dimly remembered, in long past days, when her aunt was living, having several times gone with her on Sunday afternoons to vespers in the Cathedral, and heard some one reading at the desk in the nave. Then she had not cared to listen. Why should she not go to hear it now?

Of political events Agnes knew little, and thought less. She could barely have told who

was on the throne, had she been asked. She had watched alike tumult and pageant without any intelligent notion of what was passing. Nor had she any idea that during those past days, when such things had no interest for her, the opportunity of using them had been passing away ; and that in a very few weeks the public reading of the Bible would be perilous to those who had the courage to dare it. Imprisonment would soon await any layman who should dare to read to another the Word of Life.

It often occurred that projects had to dwell in Agnes's mind for some time before she had an opportunity to put them into execution. That such should be the case with this one gave her no surprise. Generally speaking, after mass on Sunday, Joan and Dorothy donned their finest clothes, and went out on

a merry-making expedition, while Mistress Winter, also in grand array, preferred to entertain her neighbours at home. She considered Agnes on these occasions as one too many, and usually contrived to send her on some errand to a distance; but now and then, when no errand was forthcoming, she had the Sunday afternoon to herself. Five Sundays passed after the project had taken shape in her mind, and no leisure had yet come to Agnes. The Saturday arrived, the eve of the sixth Sunday, and she was still in expectation of fulfilling her hopes in some happy future. The hope was communicated to Cicely Marvell, whom Agnes met in returning from the pump, with certainty of sympathy on her part.

The full pails were only just set down on the kitchen floor, when in bustled Mistress

Flint, with a dish-cloth in her hand, which she had not waited to lay down, so eager was she to utter what she came to say.

"Go to, Gossip Winter! Heard you the news?"

"News, gramercy! Who e'er hath the grace to tell me a shred thereof?" returned Mistress Winter crustily. "What now, Gossip?"

"Forsooth, the King's Grace is departed."

"Alack the day! Who saith it?"

"Marry, my Lord Mayor himself hath proclaimed it at the Cross, and as Monday are my Lords of the Council to ride unto the Tower for to salute the new Queen."

"The new Queen! Who is she, belike?" demanded Mistress Winter, who did not usually trouble her head with politics. She was standing by the fire with a frying-pan in her hand, arrested in her occupation by

surprise and curiosity, as Mistress Flint had been in hers.

"Why, what think you? Folk say that heard the same, that the King's Highness hath left the Crown by will to his cousin, my Lady Jane Dudley, and hath put by his own sisters; and she shall be proclaimed as to-morrow in Cheapside."

"Dear heart alive!" cried Mistress Winter. "And what say my Ladies the King's sisters, that be thus left out in the cold?"

"That is as it may be," replied Mistress Flint mysteriously. "My good man saith, if the Lady Mary suffer all tamely, then is she not the maid he took her to be."

"Lack-a-day! but I do verily hope siege shall be ne'er laid to London! It should go ill with us that dwell in the outskirts."

"You say well, Gossip, in very deed. The

blessed saints have a care of us! as me-trusteth they shall."

"Not they belike!" growled Mistress Winter, resuming her suspended proceedings with the frying-pan. "They shall be every one a-looking out for the Lady Jane."

Mistress Flint came nearer, and replied in a mysterious whisper.

"Scantly so, as methinks, Gossip, when she is of the new learning, if folk speak sooth touching her. The saints and angels shall trouble them rare little about her. Trust me, they shall go with the Lady Mary, every man of them."

"Say you so?" demanded Mistress Winter. "Why, then shall the old learning come in again, an' she win."

"Aye, I warrant you!" responded her neighbour.

Mistress Winter fried her rashers with a meditative face.

"Doll!" said she, when Mistress Flint and her dish-cloth had departed, "whither is become Saint Thomas of Canterbury?"

"Go to! what wis I?" returned Dorothy. "He was cast with yon old lumber in the back attic, when King Edward's Grace come in. He hath been o' no count this great while."

"Fetch him forth," said Mistress Winter; "and, Agnes, do thou cleanse him well. If my Lady Jane win, why, 'tis but that we love not to have no dirt in the house: but if my Lady Mary, then shall he go to the gilder, and I will set him of an high place, for to be seen. Haste thee about it."

Half an hour later, Agnes (to whom Dorothy deputed the dusty search) came down from the attic, carrying a battered

wooden doll on a stand, which had once been gaudily painted, but was now worn and soiled, deprived of an arm, and gashed in sundry places, having been used as a chopping-block for a short time during the palmy days of the Reformation.

"He'll lack a new nose," remarked Mistress Winter, thoughtfully considering the poor ill-used article. "And an arm must he have, and be all fresh painted and gilt, belike. Dear heart! it shall be costly matter! Howbeit, we must keep up with the times, if we would swim and not sink."

Keeping up with the times is a very costly business. It costs many men their fortunes, many their reputations, and some their souls. Yet men and women are always to be found who will pay the full price, rather than miss doing it.

The struggle was sharp, but short. On the tenth of July, Lady Jane made her queenly entry into the Tower, in anticipation of that coronation which was never to be hers in this world ; and on the twentieth, her nine days' reign was over, and Mary was universally acknowledged Queen of England. The first important prisoner made was the Duke of Northumberland, hurled down just as he touched the glittering prize to the winning of which he had given his life ; the second was Bishop Ridley. Events followed each other with startling rapidity. The Lady Elizabeth, with her customary sagacity, kept quiet in the background until the succession of her sister was assured, and then came openly to London to meet the Queen. Peers were sent to the Tower in a long procession. Bonner was restored to the See of London, Gardiner

sworn of the Council, Norfolk and Tunstal released from prison. The Queen made her triumphal entry into her metropolis, and the new order of things was secured beyond a doubt.

Business was very brisk, for some weeks afterwards, with the carver and gilder at the bottom of Hosier Lane. Quantities of idols, thrown six years before to the moles and to the bats, were now searched for, mended, cleaned, regilt, and set up in elevated niches. Every house showed at least one, except where those few dwelt who counted not their lives dear unto them for the Master's sake. Henry Marvell went to the expense of a new Virgin, which he set up on high in his kitchen ; but Cicely did not put her hand to the accursed thing, and quietly ignored its existence. Christie, as usual, made himself generally

disagreeable, by low reverences to the image in the presence of his mother, and making faces at it in that of his father—a state of things which lasted until he was well beaten by the latter, after which occurrence he reserved his grimaces for other company.

Mistress Flint was entirely indifferent to the question ; but since every body else was setting up an idol, she followed in the crowd. If Mr. Flint cared, he kept his own counsel. Little Dickon clapped his hands at the pretty colours and bright gilding ; and Will innocently asked,

“Mother, wherefore had we ne'er Saint Christopher aforetime ?”

“Come now, be a good lad, and run to Gossip Hickman for a candle !” was his mother’s convincing answer.

But this is anticipating, and we must retrace our steps to that sixth Sunday for which Agnes was waiting in patient hope. Very anxiously she watched to see whether, when dinner was over, she would be despatched to Aldgate or Bermondsey. But it happened at last as she desired ; there was nowhere to send her. Mistress Winter, in her usual considerate style of language, gave Agnes to understand that she had no wish to see her again before dark ; and, clad in the old patched serge which was her Sunday dress, the poor drudge crept timidly into St. Paul's Cathedral.

From the Lady Chapel, soft and low, came the chant of the Virgin's Litany. The fashionable people, in rich attire, were promenading up and down the aisle known as "Paul's Walk." In the side chapels a few

worshippers lingered before the shrines ; and round a lectern, in one corner of the nave, were gathered a little knot of men and women, waiting there in the almost forlorn hope that some priest, more zealous than the rest, might come up and read to them. They could not now expect any layman to have the courage to do so. Agnes joined this group.

“ I misdoubt there'll be no reading this day,” said a grey-headed man.

“ Ne'er a priest in Paul's careth to do the same,” responded a forlorn-looking woman. “ They be an idle set of wine-bibbers, every man Jack of them.”

“ Hush thee, Goody !” whispered a second woman, giving a friendly push to the first. “ Keep a civil tongue in thine head, prithee, as whatso thy thoughts be.”

"Thoughts make no noise," said the old man, smiling grimly.

All at once there was a little stir among the group, as the tall, gaunt figure of the Black Friar was seen climbing the steps of the desk.

"Brethren!" said the voice which Agnes so well remembered, "let us read together the word of God."

And, beginning just where he had opened the book, he read to them the story of the raising of Lazarus. He gave no word of comment till he reached the end; then he shut the book and spoke to them.

"Brethren!" said the ringing voice, "this day is come Christ unto you, that He may awake you out of sleep. And if ye have not heretofore heard His voice, your sleep, like Lazarus, is that of very death. Now, O ye

dead, hear the voice of the Son of God, and live. No man cometh unto the Father but by Him. Ye must come at God neither by mass, nor by penance, nor by confessing, nor by alms-giving, but alone by Christ. And him that cometh will Christ in nowise cast out. No thief will He turn away; no murderer shall hear that he hath overmuch sinned for pardon; no poor soul shall be denied the unsearchable riches; no weary heart shall seek for rest and find none. Yea, He is become Christ—that is, God and man together—for this very thing, that He might give unto every one of you that will have them, His pardon and His peace. Come ye, every one of you, this day, and put this Christ unto the test."

Without another word the Black Friar descended from the desk, and passed along the

nave to the western door with long, rapid strides. And Agnes went home with her heart full.

Full—with what strange and new thoughts! No masses, no penances, no confessions, no alms-givings, to be the means of reconciliation with God; but only Christ. And was it possible that the Friar meant one other thing which he had not said—no intercession of saints? If Christ were so ready to receive and bless all who would come—if He were Himself the Mediator for man with God—could He need a mediator in His turn?

Yet if not, thought Agnes with a feeling of sudden terror as the supposition came to her, what became of the intercession of Mary? She who was held up as the Lady of Sorrows—just as Isis, and Cybèle, and Hertha had been before her, but of that Agnes knew nothing—

she who was pictured by the Church as the fountain of mercy and compassion — the maiden who could sympathise with the griefs of womanhood, the mother who had influence with, yea, authority over, the divine Son — what place did Friar Laurence find for her in his teaching? The mere imagination of a religion without Mary, was like the thought of chaos. Hitherto she had been the motive-power of all piety to Agnes Stone. A sermon without our Lady! It was shocking even to think of it.

Had Agnes been in the regular habit of attendance at St. Paul's Cross, she would have heard many such sermons during the reign of Edward VI. But Mistress Winter's disapprobation, combined with her own indifference, had been enough to keep her away, and the half-discourse of John Laurence at

the Cross had been the only sermon she remembered to have heard during the five years of her residence with that delectable dame. Many thoughts, therefore, now familiar to the church-going public, were quite new to her.

If she could but once again come across Friar Laurence!





CHAPTER V.

AGNES IS ASKED A QUESTION.

“ Whate’er I say, whate’er I syng,
Whate’er I do, that hart shall se,
That I shall serue with hart lovyng
That lovyng hart that lovyth me.”



EW things are more touching in their way than the fragment of paper containing the poem from which the motto to this chapter is a quotation. Among the dusty business manuscripts of the Dean and Chapter of Canterbury, in the oldest division, relating to the affairs of the Priory of Christ Church, were found by the His-

torical Commission two songs, scribbled on scraps of paper. One was a love-song of the common type, such as, allowing for difference of diction, might be had in any second-rate music-shop of the present day. But the other was of a very different and far higher order. It was the cry of the immured bird which has been forced from its nest in the greenwood, and for which life has no other attraction than to sit mournfully at the door of the cage, looking out to the fair fields, and the blue sky in which it shall stretch its wings no more. None but God will ever know the name or the story of that poor heart-weary monk, torn from all that he loved on earth, who thus "pressed his soul on paper," one hundred years before the dissolution of the monasteries. We can only hope that through the super-incumbent wood, hay, stubble, he dug down

to the one Foundation and was safe : that through the dead words of the Latin services he heard the Living Voice calling to all the weary and heavy-laden, and that he too came and found rest.

But to turn to our story.

The days rolled slowly on, undistinguishable from one another save by the practical divisions of baking-day, washing-day, brewing-day, and so forth ; and, certainly, not distinguished by any increase of comfort in the outward surroundings of Agnes's lot. She was trying to do her work heartily, as to the Lord ; but it did seem to her that the harder she tried, the harder Mistress Winter was to please ; the crosser was Joan, the more satirical was Dorothy. The only sunshine of her life was on those precious Sunday afternoons, when always the tall gaunt figure

might be seen ascending the desk in the nave of St. Paul's, and, after the reading from Scripture, came a few pithy, fervent words, which Agnes treasured up as very gems. But by-and-by, another gleam of sunlight began to creep into her life.

It was again Sunday afternoon, and the reading in St. Paul's was over for that day. But it was too soon to go back to the bosom of that uncongenial household which Agnes called home; for Mistress Winter was generally extra cross—and the ordinary exhibition was enough without the extra—if Agnes presented herself before she was expected. The now deserted steps of the Cross were the only place where she could sit; and accordingly she took refuge there. Not many minutes were over, when she recognised the dark figure of Friar Laurence passing through

the churchyard with his usual rapid step. All at once a thought seemed to strike him. He paused, turned, and came straight up to the place where Agnes was seated.

“And how is it with thee, my daughter?” he demanded.

“Well, Father; and I thank you,” said she. “Verily, touching outward things, as aforetime; but touching the inward, methinks the good Lord learneth me somewhat.”

“Be thou an apt scholar,” said he.

Agnes grew desperate, and resolved to plunge into the matter. She was afraid lest he should leave her, with one of his usual rapid movements, before she had got to know what she wanted.

“Father!” she said hastily, crimsoning as she spoke, “pray you, give me leave to demand a thing of you.”

"Ask thy will, my daughter."

"Pray you, tell me of your grace, wherefore in your goodly discourses you make at all no mention of our Lady?"

The Friar sat down on the steps, when he was asked that question.

"What wouldst thou have me for to say of her?"

"Nay, Father!" returned Agnes, humbly. "You be a learned priest, and I but an ignorant maiden; but having alway heard them that did preach sermons to make much of our Lady, methought I would fain wit, an' I might ask it at you, wherefore you make thus little."

"My child!" answered the Friar quietly, "who died on the rood for thee?"

"Jesus Christ our Lord," responded Agnes readily.

"What! not Saint Mary?"

"Certes, nay, Father, as methinks."

"And who is it that pleadeth with God for thee?"

"You have told me, Father, our Lord Christ is He. Yet the folk say alway, that our Lady doth entreat our Lord for to hear our prayers."

"Child!" asked the Black Friar, "did Christ die for thee against His will?"

"I would humbly think, not so, Father," answered Agnes meekly, "sith He needed not to have so done at all without it were His good pleasure."

"Right!" was the rejoinder. "It was by reason that God the Father loved thee, that He gave Christ to die for thee; it was by reason that Christ loved thee, that He bare for thee the pain and shame of the bitter

cross. Tell me, is there in this world any that thou lovest?"

Agnes hesitated. It seemed something new and strange to think that she could love, or could be loved, since the death of her mother. But she thought, and said, that she loved little Will Flint.

"Tell me, then," pursued her teacher, "if this little lad were in some sore trouble, and that thou couldst quickly ease him thereof, should he need for to run home[¶] and fetch his mother to entreat thee?"

"Surely, nay!" responded Agnes. "I would do the same incontinent,¹ of mine own compassion, and the more if he should ask it. I would never tarry for his mother!"

"My daughter, is thy love so much better than His that died for us? Should Christ

¹ Immediately.

tarry till His mother pray Him to be thine help, when of Himself He loveth thee?"

"But, Father—I pray you pardon me if I speak foolishly, in mine unwisdom—how then needeth a mediator at all, if God the Father be so loving unto men?"

"God is a King, whose law thou hast broken. He is all perfect; therefore must His justice be perfect, no less than His mercy. A lawgiver that were all justice should be a scourge unto men; but a lawgiver that were all mercy should be as good as no law. God hath appointed His Son to be thy Surety; and by reason that He is thy Surety, He is become thine Advocate. He hath said in His Word that the Son is the Advocate with the Father; but of an advocate with the Son never a word saith He. Wherefore God saw fit to appoint a

Mediator, He knoweth, not I. I am content that having thus decreed, He hath Himself provided the same."

Agnes looked up, after a moment's thought, with an expression of fear and trouble on her white face.

"But what then of our Lady?"

"Wherefore should there be aught beyond what God hath told us?" replied Friar Laurence. She was 'highly favoured' and 'blessed among women,' in that she was the mother of the Saviour. Must she needs *be* the Saviour to boot?"

"But we must worship her, trow?"

"Must we so? 'Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and Him only shalt thou serve.' Let us hold by God's Word, my daughter."

"Father, I wis so little thereof! nought at

all but what I do hear of you," said Agnes with a sigh.

"Then, my child," he replied gently, "list thou the better. And here is a word for thee, and for all other in thy place: 'If any man do desire to do God's will, he shall know whether doctrine be truth or no.' Keep that desire ever sharp on the whetstone of prayer. Then, surely as God is in Heaven, thou shalt know."

The next minute he was gone.

"Agnes, sweet heart!" demanded Dorothy that evening, in the sugary style which she only used when she was in a particularly tormenting mood, "prithee do me to wit of the name of thy dear friend, Master Black Friar? I beheld him and thee in so sweet converse at the Cross, it caused me to sigh that I had no such a friend

as he. I pray thee lovingly of his goodly name?"

The answers which Dorothy usually received from Agnes to questions of this kind were as short as civility permitted.

"Master John Laurence," said she.

"And how long hast been of his cognisance, sweeting?" demanded Dorothy, with more honey on her tongue than ever.

"I have wist him some six weeks," said Agnes.

"Six weeks! woe worth the day!" cried Dorothy, putting on an aspect of sentimental sorrow. "And thou never spakest word, when thou wist how dear all we do love thee, and the least we might do for joy of thy finding a new friend were to have the great bell rung at Paul's! Agnes, my fairest one, this is to entreat us but evil."

Agnes held her peace. She never felt any doubt of the exceedingly low price to be set upon Dorothy's affections towards her.

"Is he a priest, darling?" inquired Dorothy in her most coaxing tone.

"Aye," replied Agnes as curtly as before.

"Good lack, how delightsome!" exclaimed Dorothy, clasping her hands in mock rapture. "Do, of thy sweet gentlehood, bring me of his cognisance. But to think what it were to have a priest thy friend, and alway get absolution without no trouble at all!"

But about the last thing which Agnes had any intention of doing was to introduce Dorothy to John Laurence.

After that interview at the Cross, Agnes often met the Black Friar. Sometimes he passed her with a simple blessing in answer to her reverence; but more frequently he

stopped her, and inquired into her spiritual welfare. She had many a difficulty in which to ask his counsel ; many a trouble in which it was a relief to seek (and always to find) his sympathy. He was the only friend she had who spoke the language of Canaan. And it was far less as a priest than as a friend that Agnes regarded him. He was as different from old Father Dan, the Cordelier, as Mistress Flint differed from Mistress Winter. Agnes never knew, when preparing for one of those abhorred periodical interviews with the Cordelier, what he might say to her, or rather, what he might not say. She shrank with horror from his inquisitive questioning, and not much less from his petty humiliating penances. Father Dan's remedy for angry words was to fast for a week on bread and water ; for pride, to lick a cross in the dust of

the church floor; for envy and covetousness, the administration of a cat-o'-nine-tails on the shoulders. The Black Friar, on the contrary, led Agnes out of herself altogether. He had only one topic, of infinite variety, for it was Jesus Christ. Only once had Agnes asked him whether he would recommend her to administer “the discipline” to herself, as a cure for discontent and murmuring.

“If thy shoulders be discontented, why, by all means,” answered Friar Laurence, with his grave smile; “but if it be thine heart that murmureth, wherefore chastise thy shoulders?”

Agnes never put the question again, and never had recourse to the discipline. Of fasting, poor girl, she had already too much for her bodily profit, without any adventitious use of it. And when she began to pray in

reality, the rosary was very soon dropped. When a man's heart is in earnest, to keep count of his words is not possible.

Meanwhile, in the outer world, the downward progress was very rapid. One after another the Protestant Bishops were committed to prison, and the chief preachers shared their fate. The first mass was sung at Saint Bartholomew's on the eleventh of August, when the people were ready to tear the officiating priest in pieces; but by the twenty-fourth of the same month it was heard in other churches in London, and the hearers were becoming reconciled to the innovation. The once powerful Duke of Northumberland was beheaded on Tower Hill, notwithstanding his profession of Popery at the last hour; the married priests were deprived; the French Protestant residents were banished; the altar

was replaced in St. Paul's ; the Latin services, processions, palms, ashes, candles, holy bread, holy water, and all the rest of the rubbish swept away at the Reformation, came back one by one. That portion of the populace which had no particular religion was well pleased enough with these changes. The shows and the music were agreeable to them, and the Gospel sermons which they displaced had not been agreeable.

Some tell us in the present day that young people must be attracted to church, and that if music and pageant be not given them, their attendance is not likely to be secured. But what have we gained by thus going down to the Philistines to sharpen our weapons ? Are these young people attracted to any thing but the music and the pageant ? They are quite clever enough to realise the incon-

sistency of the man who serves them with bread in the pulpit, while he hands out husks from the chancel.

How many of us mean what we say, when the familiar words fall from our lips, "I believe in the Holy Ghost"? Should we think it necessary, if we really did so, to add all these condiments and spices to the pure Bread of Life? Would it not be easier to discern the real flavour of the heavenly ambrosia, if we might have it served without Italian cookery?

And is there to be no thought taken for those who are won to Christ already? to whom He is in Himself the all-sufficient attraction, and these veils and gewgaws are but annoyances, or at least superfluities? Where is the building up of the saints, the edifying of the Body of Christ? Once was

it said to Peter, “Feed My lambs ;” but twice “Feed My sheep.” How is it that so many are satisfied with a state of things in which the sheep of Christ are starved and disgusted for the sake of the lambs, or in many cases rather for the sake of those who are not in the fold at all ?

In February, 1554, a great commotion was caused in the City and suburbs by the insurrection of Wyatt, which had for its object to arrest the Queen’s projected marriage with Prince Philip of Spain. The Londoners did not show themselves particularly valiant on this occasion, and the doughty Dr. Weston—one of the most active and prominent of the Popish clergy—sang mass to them with a full suit of armour under his vestments. The Duke of Suffolk, whose sad fate it was to be perpetually getting himself into trouble in the

present, for fear of calamities which might never occur in the future, ran away in terror lest he should be suspected of complicity with the rebellion ; a proceeding which of course roused suspicion instantly, and sealed not only his own fate, but that of his daughter, Lady Jane Grey. The latter was beheaded on the twelfth of February, the former on the twenty-third. For weeks the prisons were full, and the gallows perpetually at work. The Londoners were in so excited and frightened a state—is it any marvel?—that when the phenomena of a mock sun and an inverted rainbow occurred on the fifteenth, they were terrified beyond measure. There was enough to terrify them on the earth, without troubling themselves about the sky. No man's property, liberty, or life was safe for a moment unless he were a

devout servant of holy Church ; and even in that case he held them by a frail tenure, for private spite might accuse him of heresy, and then for him there was little hope of mercy. One after another, the few who had hitherto remained staunch either fled from England, fell from the faith, or suffered at the stake.

These being the awkward circumstances of the case, Mistress Winter thought it desirable not only to gild Saint Thomas, but to put on a cloak of piety. The garment was cheap. It was not difficult to attend evensong as well as matins, and that every day instead of once in the week ; the drama performed in the Cathedral was very pretty, the music pleasant to hear, the scent of the incense agreeable. It was easy to be extremely cordial to Father Dan, and to express intense subservience to

his orders. This kind of religion was no inconvenient bridler of the tongue, nor did it in the least interfere with the pride of the natural heart. Humiliation is one thing, and humility is quite another.

Dorothy began seriously to consider whether she should take the veil. Her disposition was a mixture of the satirical and the sentimental. There would be a good deal of *éclat* about the proceeding. It was pleasant to be regarded as holier than other people. Nevertheless there were drawbacks ; for Dorothy was not fond of hard scrubbing, and was uncommonly fond of venison and barberry pie. And she had a suspicion that rather more scrubbing than venison generally fell to the lot of the holy sisters of St. Clare. But the idea of the implicit obedience to authority which would in that case be required of her decided

Dorothy to remain “in the world.” She thought there was more hope of managing a husband than a lady abbess.

Nearly two years had passed away since Agnes had first heard Friar Laurence preach at St. Paul’s Cross, and once more Corpus Christi had come round. Since that time she had grown much in the spiritual life, though she had received no outward help beyond those rare Sunday readings, and her occasional interviews with the Friar. Though Corpus Christi was still “uncertainly” kept, it naturally fell in with Mistress Winter’s new policy of veneered piety to be exceedingly respectful to all fasts and festivals. Accordingly she gave a grand banquet to some dozen acquaintances, and sent Agnes about her business. There was likely to be reading on a holy day, and Agnes bent her steps

towards the Cathedral ; but finding when she reached it that it was a little too early, she sat down on the steps of the Cross to wait. There was no one about ; for most of those who cared to keep the feast did not care to hear sermons or Bible readings ; and Agnes was thinking so intently as hardly to be conscious whether she was alone or not.

“Good Morrow, friend !” said a voice beside her ; and John Laurence sat down a little way from her on the steps.

“Good Morrow, Father,” answered Agnes.

“Agnes, I would seek thy counsel.”

Agnes looked up in astonishment. He seek her counsel ! Was it not she who had always sought his ? “

“Good luck, Father !” she exclaimed in her surprise.

John Laurence leaned his head thoughtfully on his hand, and made no further communication for some seconds.

"I know a Black Friar, Agnes," he said, speaking slowly, as if weighing each word, "who seeth no cause, neither in God's Word, neither in common reason, wherefore priests should not be wedded men, as thou wist that many, these ten years past, have been. But he is yet loth to break his mind unto the maid, seeing that many perils do now seem to lie in the way of wedded priests, and he cannot tell if it were well done or no, that he should speak unto her. If penalty fell on him, being thus wed, it should not leave her scatheless. Tell me, now, how thinkest thou? —should he do well to break his mind, or no? A maid may judge better than a man how a maid should take it."

“I would think, Father,” answered the astonished Agnes, “that a maid which did truly love any man should not suffer uncertain sorrow to stand betwixt her and him.”

“Yet how, if it were certain?”

“Nay, nor so neither.”

“Go to! Put it this case were thine own. Shouldst thou be afeared to wed with a priest?”

Agnes did not quite like such a home question. Yet she replied calmly, without any idea of the other question which was coming.

“Methinks, no; not if I truly loved him.”

“And couldst thou truly love—*me*, Agnes?”

For an instant Agnes gave no answer. She had as little expected to have that question asked her as she had expected to be created a duchess.

"Say sooth, if thou shouldst be feared," said John Laurence; and the faint suspicion of pain in his tone unloosed her lips at once.

Afraid! Afraid to leave all her dreary past behind her, and to begin a new life, with her cup of gladness full to the very brim? John Laurence was satisfied with his answer. But, for the first time, not one word of reading or comment reached Agnes's mind in an intelligible form.

"May be, my gracious Lady, your good Ladyship should like your palfrey called!" were the words that greeted Agnes when she made her reappearance in Mistress Winter's kitchen, having certainly been more forgetful than usual of the flight of time. "Or, may be, it might please your honourableness to turn your goodly eyes upon the clock, and behold whether it be meet time for a decent

maid to come home of a feast-day even? By my troth, I would wager thou hadst been to Westminster and hadst danced a galliardo in the Queen's Grace's hall, did I not know that none with 's eyes in 's head should e'er so much as look on thee. Thou idle doltish gadabout! Dost think I keep thee in board and lodgment and raiment for to go a-gossiping with every idle companion thou mayest meet? Whither hast been, thou dawdlesome patch? Up to no good, I warrant thee!"

"I have been to Paul's, Mistress, an' it like you," was all that Agnes answered.

"Soothly, it liketh me well, sweeting! A-listing some fat pickpurse friar, with his oily words, belike?"

"I have been a-talking with a friend," said Agnes boldly.

"Marry come up! So my sweet young

damosel hath made friends, quotha ! Prithee, was it my Lady's Grace of Suffolk thou wentest forth to see, or my Lady of Norfolk, trow ? Did she give thee a ride o' her velvet pillion, bestudded with gold ? ”

Agnes thought it would be best to get it over. The storm which must come might as well fall soon as late. She stood up, and looked the terrible Mistress Winter in the face.

“ Please it you, Mistress Winter, I am handfast to wedlock ; and he that shall be mine husband it is that I have talked withal this even.”

And having so spoken, Agnes waited quietly for the tempest.





CHAPTER VI.

THE SHADOW BEFORE.

“Oh for the faith to grasp Heaven’s bright For Ever,
Amid the shadows of earth’s Little While !”

JANE CREWDSON.



HERE amazement kept Mistress Winter silent for one moment after Agnes had made her startling revelation. That her bondslave should have dared to dream of freedom was almost too preposterous for belief. And she was powerless to stop this most insubordinate proceeding; for, never anticipating such a calamity,

and not fond of spending money, except on herself and her daughters, she had not, as she might have done, bound Agnes her apprentice. But after that minute of astonished silence, a thunderstorm such as even Agnes had never before experienced, burst upon her devoted head. If Mistress Winter might be believed, no such instance of rebellion, perversity, ingratitude, and all imaginable wickedness, had ever before occurred since Adam and Eve quitted Paradise. Agnes was asked to what she expected to come in this life, and where she expected to go after it. When Mistress Winter became weary of scolding, which was not soon, Joan took up the tale, and when she was tired Dorothy succeeded, and as all were gifted with considerable powers of speech, the ball was kept going until bed-time. Then Agnes was allowed to creep to

her coarse rug and bundle of straw, feeling herself in peace at last.

Thenceforward there was not much peace left, at least in the day-time. Having been interrogated as to the name and calling of her suitor, Agnes was at once dubbed Madam Dominic, my Lady's Grace of Blackfriars, and various similar titles. Dorothy, clasping her hands in mock rapture, falsely averred that she had foreseen this delightful ending to the story, when she caught sight of Agnes and Friar Laurence talking at the Cross; and proceeded to give an ironical description of the Friar's personal charms, sufficiently spiced to be very amusing to her mother and sister, and just sufficiently seasoned with truth to be exceedingly galling to Agnes. Henceforth she took every opportunity to play ill-natured practical jokes on the latter. It was not likely that

Agnes would particularly enjoy having shreds of dirty flannel and linen flung into her lap, with a tittering remark that they would enrich her trousseau ; nor feeling, when she sat at needlework, a rotten egg gently broken over her head, with the bland intimation that it was to dress her hair for the wedding ; nor the presentation, in solemn form, of torn and faded ribbons, accompanied by the information that they would become her sweetly on her bridal. Of all approach to wedding attire poor Agnes was devoid. She had but two gowns in the world—the washed-out linen bed-gown and stuff petticoat in which her work was generally done, and the well-patched serge which replaced it upon holy days. But Agnes bore all these outrages with a patience born of long practice, and nourished by glad hope. It was now May, and it had been

agreed with John Laurence that the twenty-ninth of the following March was to set her free.

They would gladly have made arrangements for an earlier date, had it been possible. But John Laurence was not much richer than Agnes herself, and they had to wait till he thought that he could reasonably afford to marry. Beside this, it was a most perilous time for a priest to think of wedlock. Things might change. Hope told that “flattering tale” which she is so fond of recapitulating to young people—often most unjustifiably. Who could tell what might happen, if they waited?

Meanwhile, what was happening was not particularly cheering, at least to the apprehension of the Gospellers. Wyatt’s insurrection had been put down, and its leader

beheaded ; and its fruitlessness was shown by the setting out of the Queen's envoys to escort Philip to England, while Wyatt yet lay in prison waiting for his trial. The Princess Elizabeth, sent to the Tower in March, on charge of complicity in Wyatt's evil deeds—who will ever know whether it was true?—had been released (at Philip's request, it was said) a few days before Corpus Christi. Cranmer, Ridley, and Latimer lay imprisoned at Oxford, and under sentence of death. Nearly every day somebody was exhibited in the pillory—women as well as men—the most frequent charge being, as it appears in the diary of that comical speller, Mr. Henry Machyn—"spekyng yll of good Qwen Mare." The difficulty which presents itself to the present generation is, how else her subjects could well speak of her proceedings. How-

ever, they could have held their peace. Probably the discreet portion of the community did so.

It may seem a little strange, on the surface, when one considers how it was that the reign of Mary was felt so galling, that the accession of Elizabeth was welcomed with such a fever of delight and triumph, such a sense of relief and freedom, as was undoubtedly the case—and yet that men bore the former and made no sign, waited for the latter with indescribable longing, but without any attempt to bring it about. Perhaps we must attribute this partly to that law-abiding instinct inherent in the ordinary Englishman: yet I think still more to the fact that as a rule, at all times, in all respects, the majority of the nation are indifferent. There were men who died at the stake in defence of the free Gospel. There

were men who kindled those fires, and stamped out the truth, so far as in them lay. But these, even when put together, were still a minority. The majority were the watchers who stood round the stake, and who cared nothing for the cause on either side—who went to see a martyrdom as a Spaniard goes to see a bull-fight, with neither sympathy nor enmity towards the martyr. Of course, these would be, as to religious profession, what they found it to their own interest that they should be. The most popular and crowded of all the Seven Churches is the Church of Laodicea.

“*Because thou art lukewarm . . . I will spue thee out of My mouth.*”

It was not without some difficulty that Agnes contrived to enjoy an occasional, and always short, interview with her betrothed.

Such interviews were generally followed by forced audiences of Dorothy, who professed an entirely hypocritical interest in the progress of the love-match, and did her best to make Agnes recount what her lover had said to her. Agnes, however, was wise enough to keep out of the trap laid for her, and Dorothy took little by her motion.

Sometimes the lovers met for a few minutes before or after the reading in the Cathedral ; sometimes there could be a few words as Agnes carried her pails to and from the Horsepool ; once or twice, when Mistress Winter had barred the door on her for misdemeanour, they walked to some quiet nook in the fields near Clerkenwell, refreshing themselves with converse on the one grand subject nearest to both hearts — nearer even than each other. But the readings in the Cathedral

were becoming much fewer than of old. It was a perilous thing to do now, and John Laurence was a marked man. Not that he feared danger: his motto was that of the old French knight—"Fais ce que dois, advienne que pourra!" But his brother clergy were afraid lest it should be known that such compromising proceedings as regular Scripture lessons were permitted at St. Paul's. Some from dislike of the Bible-reading, a few from honest kindly feeling towards the reader, managed to take care that the lectern was otherwise occupied, during the hour which alone John Laurence could usually spare from other duties.

At last King Philip landed in England, and his meeting and marriage with the Queen took place at Winchester. The City and suburbs blazed with bonfires, and rang with

bells; the *Te Deum* was chanted in every church; the utmost delight had to be felt, or at any rate professed, by all who did not wish to be reported as disaffected persons. On the twelfth of August, the royal bride and bridegroom made their state entry into London. A heretic had been burnt at Uxbridge four days previous.

Every house in Cow Lane, imitating every other street in London, poured forth its members to see the procession. The good folks locked their doors, and left their houses to take care of themselves. Agnes, who liked a pretty sight as well as other people, had taken her stand with the crowd, and was looking out with interest as the first of the advancing horsemen who opened the procession became visible, when suddenly she felt a hand upon her own. She

looked up into the welcome face of John Laurence.

"Art come to see the sight, John?" she asked with a smile.

"I am come to see two sights," said he, returning it,—but his smiles were always grave. "To wit, the King's and Queen's Graces of the one hand, and Agnes Stone of the other. Hast a mind for a walk toward the Clerks' Well, when all be gone by?"

"With a very good will," she answered.

But the pageant was coming past now, and they exchanged the use of their tongues for that of their eyes. It was entirely equestrian, and came over London Bridge, from Suffolk Place, where the King and Queen had passed the night. Our friends were not prepossessed by the royal bridegroom, whose low stature, want of beauty, and gloomy expression, struck

them in the same light that they did most Englishmen, as denoting neither grace nor graciousness. Only two persons are recorded ever to have loved Philip—Queen Mary herself, and her successor, the fair and sagacious Elizabeth of France.

Just opposite the place where Agnes and the Friar stood was an allegorical group, of which one painted figure, supposed to be Henry VIII., was holding out to the Queen an open Bible, inscribed with the words *Verbum Dei*. But before night a warning had been conveyed to the authorities that the Queen was offended with this representation of her father, and the Bible was painted out so hastily that the hand of the figure was partly obliterated with it.

When the pageant had gone by, and the crowd had sufficiently dispersed, John Lau-

rence and Agnes set out for their walk to Clerkenwell. They found a shady field, in a corner of which they sat down, and the Friar drew from his pocket a Latin Psalter,—the only form of the Bible with which it was then safe to be caught. From this he read to Agnes the hundred and seventh Psalm, translating it as he went on into the only tongue she knew.

“And He led them forth by the right way, that they might go to the City of Habitation.”

He paused at that seventh verse, and half closing the book, sat looking thoughtfully into the blue heaven.

Very vaguely did Agnes enter into his deeper thoughts. Her ideas concerning public events, and possible future dangers, were of a very misty description. She kept silent a

moment. Then, when he did not speak, she said—

“Well, John?”

“By the right way!” he said dreamily, rather as if speaking to himself than to her. “And He leads them, too, *in portum voluntatis eorum*—to the haven of their desire.”

“That is, Heaven?” said Agnes questioningly. Her admiration for his knowledge and wisdom was high.

“That is Heaven,” he replied in the same tone as before.

“John, what thinkest Heaven shall be like?”

“Like God!” said the Black Friar slowly. “Therefore, glorious—wonderful—perfect in every part—holy—satisfying.”

“And right fair and beauteous, doubtless,” she added, by way of completing the picture.

"That which is perfect must be fair," said John Laurence. "He saith to His Church, 'Thou art all fair, My love, and a stain is not in thee.' That is, to thee, and me, Agnes."

"To *me*?" she repeated, in an awe-struck voice. "Nay, how so, trow? I am all o'er a stain with my sins."

The answer was in inspired words. "'For perfect wert thou, in My beauty which I put upon thee, saith the Lord God.'"

Agnes sat still, trying to take in the idea.

"Hear yet again another His saying to the Church: 'Thou hast wounded Mine heart, My sister-spouse; thou hast wounded Mine heart in one of thine eyes, and in one chain of thy neck.' Now what is the eye?—is it not a member of the body? Doth not this learn us that every one of Christ's members

hath his proper and peculiar love of Him, that cannot belong to any other? Yea, more; for the chain of the neck is not a member, but only the ornament of a member. Wherefore one grace—for the ornaments of the soul be his graces—one grace of one Christian soul is enough to delight Christ's heart."

Both were silent for a while, Agnes learning her new lesson.

"Mine heart!" said John Laurence suddenly, "the right way at times looks like the wrong."

"What meanest thou, John?" said Agnes, looking into his face, and startled by its expression of pain.

"Dear heart, we know not what lieth afore us. We be so blind, Agnes! But He knows. It is enough, if we are ready to follow Him. Canst thou dare follow, as well through the

flood and the fire as through the flowery mead?"

"I cannot tell," she said tremulously. "I would try."

"There be two staves to lean on in our weariness," he said. "The one is for earth: 'Fear not, because I am with thee.' And the other is of Heaven, but gildeth earth with hope: 'Where I am, there shall My servant be.' There must be glory and sweetness, where is Jesus Christ."

Long years afterwards, Agnes recalled those words.





CHAPTER VII.

SAD TIDINGS.

“But of all sad words by tongue or pen,
The saddest are these—‘It might have been !’”



HOUGH the majority of the nation were comparatively indifferent to the religious changes that had been effected, there were certain political occurrences which they viewed with less equanimity. One of these was the vast number of Spaniards brought over by Philip. It was reckoned—doubtless with some exaggeration—that in September, 1554, three Spaniards

might be seen in London to every Englishman. The rumour ran that five thousand more were on the way. The nation was both vexed and alarmed. Was England to be reduced, like the Netherlands, to the condition of a mere outlying province of Spain?

Before eight weeks had run out from the day of Philip's arrival in London, his hand upon the reins was plainly visible. He had been heard to say that if he believed a member of his own body to be tainted with heresy, he would amputate it immediately and without remorse. The Gospellers were not left quite ignorant of what they might reasonably expect.

It was on a quiet morning in October that Agnes was on her way to Horsepool, when she was overtaken by Cicely Marvell, carrying a yoke of water-pails like herself.

"Good Morrow, Mistress Marvell!" said the former. "Dear heart! but you look something troubled belike. Is any sick with you?"

Cicely and Agnes were quite aware that their religious sentiments were alike. It is in the cloudy and dark day that those who fear the Lord speak often one to another.

"Heavy news, my maid!" said Cicely in a low voice, and shaking her head. "Yester-night sixty folk were arrest in London for reading of Lutheran books."

"Poor folk, trow?"

"All manner, as I do hear."

Neither high nor low, in those days, were safe, if suspicion of heresy were once roused against them. The higher class were the more likely to be detected; yet there was

a little more hesitation in bringing them to the stake. But it was easy to see, then as now, that as a rule it was the poor of this world whom God had chosen to be rich in faith. For every rich man or titled lady who incurred bodily danger through faithfulness to the truth, there were at least fifty of those whom the world regards as "nobody."

There was a strange mixture of comedy and tragedy in the events of those days. The miracle-play alternated with the pillory, and the sight-seers went from the burning of a heretic in the morning to see the new athletic games, introduced by the Spaniards, in the afternoon in Palace Yard. A grand tournament at Court preceded, and a bear-baiting followed, the humiliating spectacle of the Parliament of England kneeling at the feet of Cardinal Pole, and abjectly craving

absolution from Rome. One man—Sir Ralph Bagenall—stood out, and stood up, when all his co-senators were thus prostrate in the dust. He was religiously a Gallio, not a Gospeller; but he was politically a sturdy Englishman, and no coward. Strange to say, no harm came to him. Nay, is it strange, when we read, “Them that honour Me, I will honour,” and “Whosoever shall lose his life for My sake and the Gospel’s, the same shall save it”?

There were no longer any sermons preached at the Cross that a Gospeller cared to hear. One was forthcoming regularly every Sunday; but the preachers were Pendleton the renegade, Feckenham the suave, or Gardiner the man of blood. The uneasy feeling of a section at least of the populace was shown by frays at Charing Cross, incipient insurrections in

Suffolk, assaults on priests at the altar, and unaccountable iconoclasms. The image of Becket was twice found broken by mysterious means ; and a cat, tonsured, and arrayed in miniature vestments, was discovered hanging on the gallows in Cheapside, while the offer of a large reward failed to reveal the offender.

During this time, Mistress Winter's piety had been blooming in a wonderful manner. She kept St. Thomas of Canterbury on a small table, with a lamp burning before it, and every morning diligently courtesied to this stock and stone. When her hands were not otherwise busied, a rosary was pretty sure to be found in them, on which she recounted Paters and Aves with amazing celerity. The bitterness of her tongue kept pace with her show of religiousness. Ugly adjectives, and

uglier substantives, were flung at Agnes all the day long, and whether she deserved reproof or not appeared to make no difference. But though words and even blows were not spared, Mistress Winter went no further. Agnes was much too useful to be denounced as a heretic, at least so long as she remained at her post in Cow Lane. She did all the unpleasant work in the house, besides filling the convenient offices of a vent for Joan's temper, and a butt for Dorothy's ridicule. But though getting rid of her was not to be thought of, words were cheap, however peppery, and a box on the ear was a great relief to the feelings of the giver—those of the recipient not being taken into account. So Agnes got plenty of both.

“Sweet heart, how camest by yonder black eye?” anxiously demanded John Laurence,

on the last Sunday afternoon in January, when Agnes and he were coming back from their favourite stroll towards Clerkenwell.

"'Tis nought new, belike," said she with a smile.

"Please God," returned he, "it shall be ancient matter and by-gone, very soon."

He stood still a moment, looking over the crowded chimneys of the City, just beyond the green field through which they were walking.

"Doth the thought e'er come to thy mind, Agnes," asked he, "how soon all things shall be bygones? At the most afore many years,—yea, afore many days, it may be,—thou and I shall be away hence from this world. And even this great city, that doth look thus firm and substantial, ere long shall not be left thereof one trace. Yea, heaven and earth

shall pass away : but Christ's words shall not pass away."

Agnes listened with interest, but gave no answer beyond a gesture of assent.

"I have fallen to think much of late," said the Black Friar, "of one word of His,—assuredly not to pass away, nor be forgotten—'Whosoever shall deny Me before men, him will I also deny before My Father which is in Heaven.' Verily, it were awful matter, to draw down on a man's head this public denying of Jesu Christ."

"Dear heart!" said Agnes, at once sympathetically and deprecatingly.

"Ah!" he replied, with a sigh of self-distrust: "hope is one matter, and belief another."

"Dost fear some ill work, trow?" she asked doubtfully.

John Laurence did not answer at once. He spoke after a minute, dreamily, as if to himself; a habit to which Agnes was now quite accustomed.

“‘Be not afraid of them that kill the body, and after that have no more that they can do. But I will forewarn you whom ye shall fear: Fear Him, which after that He hath killed hath power to cast into Hell.’”

The Friar walked on for a few seconds with his usual rapidity, and then suddenly stopped again.

“Men think lightly of these things, dear heart,” said he. “Most men have a far greater care lest they break a limb, or lose an handful of gold, than lest they be cast into Hell. Yet see thou how Christ took the same. And He knew,—as we cannot know,—what is Hell.”

"The good Lord keep us!" ejaculated Agnes fervently.

"Amen!" responded the Black Friar. "'He shall keep the feet of His saints.' It is not we that keep ourselves. 'Tis not we that hold Him, no more than the babe holdeth himself in his mother's arms. And the mother were more like to leave the babe fall into the fire or the water, than He to loose hold upon His trustful child."

He was trying to prepare her for what might come. But she was not prepared.

Cold though it was, they had a pleasant walk that afternoon. The time of release was drawing so near, that Agnes felt almost as bright and glad as if it were already come. At Cow Cross, her betrothed bade her farewell, saying with his grave smile that he would not come further, lest it

should cost her an extra taunt from Mistress Dorothy.

Agnes was quite satisfied to be saved the small torment in question. She did not realize how soon the time might come when it would seem to her a lighter thing to endure Dorothy's ridicule for a calendar year, than to miss one glimpse of that face.

We recognize such facts as these—when they come.

The next day passed over uneventfully. The Tuesday morning rose, bright, clear, and frosty. Agnes was in spirits perfectly marvellous, considering what she had to endure. She was making melody in her heart as she carried her pails to the pump, thinking gladly how short her time of trial was growing, and how bright her future would be. It mattered nothing to her that she would have to work

as hard as ever ; nothing, that she must live in a single room of a crowded street in the heart of the City ; nothing, that John Lawrence was a worn, gaunt man of more than twice her years, and utterly unattractive in the eyes of the world ; nothing, that the day was bitterly cold, and her thin bed-gown a very insufficient protection. Everything was rose-colour to her. Had she not Christ in Heaven, and one honest heart that loved her upon earth ?

When Agnes came in sight of the pump, she perceived a little child sitting crouched upon the step of the trough, and evidently crying. Her heart was not hard to touch, and setting down her pails she laid her hand on the boy's shoulder. He had been too much absorbed in his grief to notice her approach, but when she spoke he looked up,

showing the now tear-stained face of little Will Flint.

"Why, Will, my little lad!—what matter now?"

Will burst into a fresh paroxysm without answering.

"Metrusteth thou hast not been an ill lad?"

Will shook his curly head.

"Nay, what then? Is Mother sick?"

Another shake.

"Come, tell me what it is. Mayhap we shall find some remedy."

"O Mistress Agnes!" came with a multitude of sobs.

"Nay, then, tell me now!" pleaded Agnes.

"O Mistress Agnes, they have ta'en him!"

"Ta'en whom, my lad? Sure, thy little brother Dickon is not stole away?"

“No!” sobbed Will. “But, O Mistress!—they’ve ta’en him to yon ugly prison, afore those wicked folk, and they call him an here-heretic, and they say he’ll ne’er come out again—nay, never!”

This was manifestly something serious.

“But ta’en whom, Will, dear?—not thy father?”

“Oh nay, nay!—the Black Friar.”

“What Black Friar, Will?” Agnes hardly knew her own voice.

“Why, our Black Friar—Father Laurence. There was only one.”

For a minute there was dead silence in reply—a minute, during which the rose-colour died out of sky and earth, and the glad music was changed to funeral bells. Then Agnes rose from her stooping position.

“There was only one!” she repeated, with

a far-away look in her eyes, which were fixed on the tower of the Cathedral, but saw nothing.

"He was so good to me and Dickon!" sobbed Will.

"Child, wilt do thy best to find out whither they have ta'en him, and when he is to be had afore the Bishops, and then come and tell me?"

Will, occupied in rubbing his eyes with his small sleeve, nodded assent. Agnes filled her pails mechanically, and carried them home. The world must go on, if the sun would never rise any more for her.

Early the next morning Will brought her news that the six prisoners, of whom John Laurence was one, had been taken to the Counter, and that on the eighth of February they were to appear before Bishop Gardiner

at Winchester Palace, Southwark. Knowing that Mistress Winter would soon hear of the arrest, if she had not already done so, Agnes made no attempt to conceal the news. She told it herself, and requested permission to go and hear the examination.

“What, on a brewing-day!” cried Mistress Winter. “Good sooth, nay! They be right sure to be put by to another day. If that be not brewing, nor baking, nor cleaning, nor washing day, may be thou canst be let go for an half-hour then.”

“Prithee, Mistress Sacramentary, don thy velvet gown!” spitefully added Dorothy.

The hall of the Bishop’s Palace was crowded that morning. The six prisoners were led out in order, according to their social rank:—first, William Hunter, the apprentice-boy of Brentford, only sixteen

years of age ; then Thomas Tomkins, the weaver ; Stephen Knight, the barber of Maldon ; William Pygot, the butcher of Braintree ; John Laurence, the Black Friar ; lastly, Thomas Hawkes, the only one in the group who wrote himself “gentleman.” They were such common, contemptible people, that Gardiner thought them beneath his august notice, and scornfully referred them to Bonner’s jurisdiction. They were marched at once to the Consistory sitting in St. Paul’s Chapter House, whither the crowd followed.

The Consistory demanded of the accused persons—

“Do ye believe that the body of Christ is in the Sacrament, without any substance of bread and wine remaining ?”

The prisoners replied that this doctrine was not agreeable to Scripture.

“Do ye believe that your parents, your sponsors, the King, Queen, nobility, clergy, and laity of the realm, believing this doctrine, were true and faithful Christians, or no?”

“If they so believed,” was the answer, “they were therein deceived.”

“Did ye, yourselves, in time past, truly believe the same, or no?”

They said, “Aye, heretofore; but not now.”

“Do ye believe that the Spirit of Christ has been, is, and will be, with the Church, not suffering her to be deceived?”

“We do so believe,” replied the prisoners.

“Have you,” pursued Bonner, “being infamed to me as heretics, not been a good space in my house, and been there fed, and instructed by those desirous of your soul’s welfare—and yet you refuse this belief?”

The accused admitted all this.

"Will ye now conform?"

"In no whit, until it be proved by Holy Scripture," came the decisive answer.

"If not," demanded the Bishop, "what grounds have you to maintain your opinion? Who is of the same opinion? What conference have ye had therein with any? What comfort and relief had you from any, and their names and dwelling-places?"¹

This was a deliberate request that they would accuse their friends and teachers. But the prisoners did not respond.

"We have no ground but the truth," they said, "which we were taught by Dr. Taylor, of Hadleigh, and such other."

Since Taylor of Hadleigh was already

¹ These questions, in point of wording, are very much condensed.

burnt to ashes, this admission could do him no harm.

The accused persons were then remanded until nine o'clock the next morning, and advised in the meantime to "bethink them what they would do."

It was Cicely Marvell who told all this in a low voice to Agnes Stone, as they stood together under a tree in the meadow behind Cow Lane.

"Keep a good heart, dear maid!" said Cicely encouragingly. "May be it shall be better than we might fear. 'The Lord is very pitiful, and of tender mercy.'"

But Agnes shook her head. To such a trial she at least anticipated no other end than death. Too well she knew that, like the Master whose servant John Laurence was, "for envy they had delivered him."

Perhaps, too, her spirituality was of a higher type than that of Cicely. She recognised that the Lord's tender mercy lies not in sparing pain to His chosen, but in being with them when they pass through the purifying waters, and bearing them in His arms through the fire which is to consume their earthliness, but not themselves. His is a love which will inflict the pain that is to purify, and tenderly comfort the sufferer as he passes through it.

Agnes hardly knew how she passed that Friday evening. Her usual duties were all done; but she went through them with eyes that saw not, with deafened ears on which Mistress Winter's abuse fell pointless, for which Dorothy's sarcasms had no meaning. God was in Heaven, and John Laurence and his persecutors were on earth: beyond this

there was to her nobody and nothing. The vexations for which she used to care were such mere insignificant pin-pricks that it was impossible even to notice them now.

So the Friday evening, and the sleepless night, wore away: and the Saturday morning broke.





CHAPTER VIII.

THE CROWN OF LIFE.

“Welcome scaffold for precious Christ.”

REV. JAMES RENWICK.

Tso happened that the 9th of February, to which the prisoners had been remanded, was not a day devoted to baking, brewing, cleaning, or washing, in the household of Mistress Winter; who, not in complimentary language, gave Agnes her permission to spend half-an-hour in the Chapter-house.

Already, before the sitting of the Consistory, Bishop Bonner had sent, first for Pygot and Knight, and afterwards for Tomkins and Hunter, into his "great chamber," and asked them if they were willing to recant. They all refused, "not being persuaded in their consciences" that the doctrines propounded to them were true. These four were then brought into the Consistory, and a paper was offered them to sign, containing a synopsis of their belief. The statement appears to have been a fair and true definition of their creed, for all four attached their names to it without hesitation.

It was just at this time that Agnes entered the Chapter-house, as these prisoners were being removed, and John Laurence was brought forward.

"Pray you, come hither to me," said Bonner,

with a show of friendliness, due to his prisoner's priesthood.

Calmly enough, to outward show, Agnes looked on his face as he came up to the Bishop,—that face so plain and uncomely to other eyes, so dear and beautiful to hers. There would be time enough for weeping hereafter, in that dreary future, of which the vista seemed to stretch before her in illimitable desert: but now she could afford to lose no tone of that voice, no moment of the time permitted for gazing on that face. She might never see him again until they should stand together before the throne of God.

John Laurence answered every question asked of him calmly and firmly. He admitted that he was a priest, eighteen years in orders, and sometime a Black Friar professed.

But Bonner's spies had told him more than this; and it was not his wont to omit the wringing of a heretic's heart.

"Art thou not ensured unto a maid in way of marriage?"

"I am so, my Lord," said John Laurence.

"Didst thou truly propose to wed with her?"

"By God's leave, I did."

And Agnes Stone, standing in the crowd, heard herself thus confessed before God and man—a confession which, she full well knew, stamped him who made it, in the eyes of these his judges, with indelible disgrace.

"And what is thine opinion on the Sacrament?" inquired Bonner in a confidential manner.

"It is a remembrance of Christ's body."

"Then what sayest thou of them which believe, as we do, that it *is* Christ's body?"

"I say that they are deceived."

"Thinkest thou that all do err which believe not as thou dost?" said Bonner with his usual bluster.

"I do say so, my Lord," was the determined answer.

Once more the prisoners were remanded, but only until afternoon. Agnes did not dare to stay. She had ascertained from Cicely Marvell, whom she saw in the crowd, that prisoners' friends were often permitted a farewell interview between sentence and execution; and if she meant to apply for that, she must not risk Mistress Winter's anger by remaining now. Cicely promised to bring her news of the sentence.

"Lo' you now! here cometh my fair Lady

Dominica!" was Dorothy's salutation, as Agnes re-entered the kitchen. "What news, sweet Mistress Blackfriars? Is thy goodly sweet-heart consecrate Lord Bishop of Duncery, or shall he but be Master Doctor Dean of Foolscap?"

Agnes vouchsafed no answer.

"Woe betide us! here is Madam Gospeller hath lost her tongue!" cried Dorothy. "Do but give me to wit, prithee, sweetest Sacramentary! So dear love I all Black Friars, I may never sleep till I know."

"They be yet again remanded," replied Agnes dreamily.

Though she felt sure what the end would be, it was impossible to realize it. Surely all that was passing must be some dreadful dream, from which she would presently awake, perhaps in the little bed which used to be

hers in her aunt's pretty cottage, and find that all the past, for eight years, had been a groundless vision.

Yet Dorothy's torturing pin-pricks were real enough. All day long she persisted in worrying Agnes by pretended sympathy—so patently pretended that it was excessively annoying. The towel was snatched from her as she was washing her hands, with an entreaty that Dorothy might take that trouble for her; the mop was hidden where she could not find it, with an assurance that it would but increase the bitterness of her sorrow to discover it; invisible strings were stretched across the kitchen where she was sure to fall over them,—in order, as Dorothy tenderly intimated, to turn her thoughts from the painful anxiety which she must be enduring. It seemed to Agnes as if night and certainty

would never come. Yet how could she wish it, when she felt so sure what the awful certainty would be? The hours wore on; the dark came at last; and when the night had fairly set in, Cicely Marvell's soft tap was heard on Mistress Winter's door. Agnes opened it herself. Dorothy had indeed rushed to do it, but fortunately Agnes contrived to reach it before her. It was evident that Cicely was loth to tell her terrible news, though Dorothy begged her, over Agnes' shoulder, to relieve her heartrending suspense. Was it from one faint throb of womanly feeling in her usually hard heart, that Mistress Winter, in sharp tones, summoned Dorothy within, and left Agnes to hear the news alone?

"Speak, Mistress Marvell," said Agnes, in that preternaturally calm manner which she had worn from the first. "It is death."

"Aye, poor Agnes! It is death by fire."

"And in the meantime?—"

"They lie in Newgate. He shall be taken to Colchester to suffer, being he was there born, the 28th of this March."

"Then he dieth on the 29th?"

"E'en so."

He was to die on the very day they had fixed for their marriage. To *what* had Agnes been looking forward so joyfully during those past weary months?

When the prisoners had reappeared before Bonner in the afternoon, they were asked, for the last time, if they would recant their heresy.

"We are not heretics," they replied; "the contrary is heresy."

Then, on these six contumacious men, was passed in due form the sentence of death.

Each was to suffer at the place of his birth: Thomas Tomkins in Smithfield, on the 16th of March; William Hunter, the poor apprentice-boy, at Brentford, on the twenty-sixth; William Pygot at Braintree, and Stephen Knight at Maldon, on the twenty-eighth.

It was only one interview with the prisoner for which Agnes dared to hope, and she waited for it until the day before he was to be degraded from his priestly office. Mistress Winter's momentary sympathy, if it had existed, was over, and she grumbled a good deal when Agnes preferred her request for a few hours' leave of absence. But she granted the boon at last.

"It will be the last time," said Agnes quietly.

No more meetings at Paul's Cross,—no

more summer walks to Clerkenwell,—no more readings from the Cathedral lectern! Instead of that, for him the chariot of fire, and then the King's welcome home, the white robe, and the palm of victory, and the crown of life. And for her,—ah! what? It might be a forty years' wandering in the Wilderness of Sinai, with the River of Jordan at its close, ere she could come to the shore of the Promised Land. Yet the Promised Land was sure, as was the Promiser.

A strange specimen of human nature was Alexander, the keeper of Newgate prison: a man who could request Bishop Bonner to burn some more heretics because the cells were inconveniently crowded, and then, after a good supper, sit down and play the fiddle. He was extremely fond of music, though it

scarcely exercised a soothing influence in his exceedingly savage breast.

Happily for Agnes, this gentleman happened to be in a good temper when she presented herself at his gates. He admitted her into the great hall, and after a short delay took her down to the low damp cell where condemned prisoners were confined. There she found John Laurence.

They were both very calm,—these two, to each of whom in that hour's last meeting the bitterness of death was passing. Each tried to be brave for the other's sake ; each strengthened the other's hand in God.

"This is scarce what we looked for, sweet heart," said the Black Friar. "We had gathered a fair dish of honey, but our good Master saw it should harm us, and appointed us in the stead thereof a dish of wormwood.

Neither is all the honey gone from us, for it is sweet to suffer for His sake."

"I am glad thou hast stood firm," said Agnes quietly.

"Thou shalt have the bitterer portion, my poor heart! Yet it is for no long season. We must meet soon, in our Father's House."

"Truly. And the time may be very short," she answered.

"And canst thou give me up, mine Agnes, for Christ's sake? For mark thou, that which is wrenched away is not given."

She looked up with fixed, tearless eyes.

"Aye, John. I can give thee up for Christ's sake. But I could not for any other."

So they parted—for the last time. For when they should meet again in the Father's House, they would part no more for ever.

“Not for any other!” Is there no special tenderness in the heart of the loving Saviour, for those who have given up that one thing which would not, could not, be resigned for any sake but His?

The next day there was the bitter mockery of degradation. Every vestment of the priesthood was put upon the martyr; one by one they were torn from him with curses. The crown of his head, where the tonsure had been cut, was defaced; the anointed head and hands were roughly scraped, to deprive them of the sacred unction. But the unction from the Holy One was beyond their reach.

Then came the journey to Colchester, and, lastly, the *auto da fé*. “Not able to go, his legs sore worn with heavy irons, as also his body weakened by evil keeping,” John Lawrence was borne in a chair to his chariot of

fire. We are told that at this martyrdom there were seen little children running round the stake, crying, "Lord, strengthen Thy servant, and keep Thy promise!" God did keep His promise, and strengthened His servant.

It was soon over; and they had no more that they could do.

There were martyr-crowns for such men as John Laurence. But were there none for women such as Agnes Stone, whose martyrdom lasted, not an hour, but a lifetime,—who laid on the Lord's altar, not their lives, but all that made life precious?

We are not told what became of her. Nor does it much matter. Rather than sketch a fancy future for such a life as hers, let us remember the true end, when that life was over. For three hundred years, more or less,

these two, who gave each other up for Christ, have been given back by Christ to each other: together they have followed the Lamb whithersoever He goeth; the Lord has been their everlasting light, and the days of their mourning have been ended.



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